CHANGING ENGLISHNESS IN FIRST WORLD WAR POETRY

KHOR KUAN MIN

(B.A. (Hons), NUS)

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

2012

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

_____

Khor Kuan Min

20 July 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor John Richardson for supervising me throughout the period of writing this thesis, and providing invaluable feedback and advice.

I would also like to thank Professor Jane Nardin for reading certain parts of the thesis and providing suggestions for improvement.

CONTENTS

~

Chapter 6

SUMMARY

This thesis examines, via close analysis of relevant poems, how the first-hand experience of the First World War changed the prominent war poets' collective vision of England. The England of the pre-war poetic consciousness, as represented by the Georgian poets, was transformed by the unique experience of fighting in the biggest and most destructive war at that point in time. Two key aspects of this new vision of England are examined – 'Place' and 'People'. England as a place is depicted as vividly as the war poets' immediate environment of trenches and battlefields, despite their physical isolation from their home country. This England, like that of the Georgians, is predominantly rural, but is also depicted with more realism and detail. This view of England sprang from the war poets' heightened sensitivities created by the war experience, their nostalgia, and their desire to end the war by contrasting its realities with ideal English landscapes. Yet in their isolation, the war poets also came to conceive of a new, more egalitarian England overseas, defined primarily in terms of their fellow soldiers. Traditional divisions of nationality and class were attenuated, replaced by the soldier-civilian divide. The old England, viewed in terms of its civilians who are mostly ignorant of the war's realities and hence exist in a world apart, was viewed as inadequate and morally inferior. Nevertheless, the war poets' vision was still fundamentally conservative as it remained rooted in tradition, a tradition most apparent in their treatments of class and language. Despite the dilution of class boundaries, the traditional class system was still carried over to the trenches, and is most visible in the war poets' simplistic depictions of soldiers from the lower classes. Their use of traditional language and forms, for instance the sonnet, also aligned them with the past, unlike their Modernist contemporaries. Their vision of England is a distinctive but limited one, despite the shaping influence of the war experience.

CITATIONS

This thesis generally uses the MLA in-text citation method, with some modifications. For primary references, if the title of the poem quoted is already given in the text, only the relevant lines are cited in parentheses:

> The last poem in Gurney's sequence, 'England the Mother', offers what seems to be a straightforward tribute to England in a manner similar to Brooke's: 'Death impotent, by boys bemocked at, who / Will leave unblotted in the soldier-soul / Gold of the daffodil, the sunset streak, / The innocence and joy of England's blue' (11–4).

If the poem title is not in the text, it is included in parentheses:

> England is no longer viewed through the indulgently patriotic lens of Brooke, who fails to comprehend, or at least glosses over entirely, the uglier side of war and his country's complicity in it: 'If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England. There shall be / In that rich earth a richer dust concealed' ('The Soldier', 1–4).

On occasion, if there is the possibility that poem citations are not immediately clear or could be confused with secondary-source citations, the prefix 'l.' or 'll.' (for 'line'/'lines') is included before the poem line(s):

> British history, even pre-1707, can arguably be defined by the many wars fought against various opponents, for instance the multiple conflicts with France and Spain, the American Revolutionary War, and, as in Rudyard Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden', the 'savage wars of peace' (l.18) fought in the name of imperial expansion and domination.

For prose quotations from poets (e.g. letters), the title of the publication (shortened if the poet's identity is clear) from which the quotation is taken is given, followed by the page no(s), e.g. (*Collected Works* 373). If the quotation is taken from a secondary source, due acknowledgement is made, e.g. (Cited in Egremont 144).

For citations of secondary material, the standard form is ‘Surname-Page no(s)’ in parentheses, e.g. (Colley 6). If the author’s name is made clear in the text, only the page no(s) is/are given:

> As Martin Stephen observes, ‘[t]he Georgians were only prepared to write about what they knew and had experienced personally’ (29), and the poet’s lines certainly suggest he is writing from direct experience.

However, if the author’s name is in the text but it is not entirely clear if the subsequent citation is attributed to him/her, the standard form will apply. If two or more publications by the same author are included in the List of Works Cited, the year of the relevant publication is also included, e.g. (Lucas 1986, 75). If the years are also the same, the title of the publication is used instead:

> As Jean Moorcroft Wilson elaborates, ‘[i]t is important to remember that Sorley was “helplessly angry”... about war from the start, for it shows greater maturity and discernment than most of his contemporaries. Very few soldier-poets realized the futility of war at such an early stage’ (*Charles Hamilton Sorley: A Biography* 157).

Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1917, Ivor Gurney published a five-sonnet sequence, 'Sonnets 1917', dedicated to the memory of Rupert Brooke and clearly inspired by Brooke's own famous five-sonnet sequence entitled '1914'. The last poem in Gurney's sequence, 'England the Mother', offers what seems to be a straightforward tribute to England in a manner similar to Brooke's: 'Death impotent, by boys bemocked at, who / Will leave unblotted in the soldier-soul / Gold of the daffodil, the sunset streak, / The innocence and joy of England's blue' (11–4). Yet this unequivocally patriotic conclusion and idealised depiction of England is at odds with the first part of the sonnet, which expresses a far more troubled and ambiguous view of England: 'We have done our utmost, England, terrible / And dear taskmistress, darling Mother and stern' (1–2). The poet describes how he and fellow soldiers 'watch your [England's] eyes that tell / To us all secrets, eyes sea-deep that burn / With love so long denied; with tears discern / The scars and haggard look of all that hell' (5–8). Despite Gurney's loyalty to England, his feelings for it have been complicated by his experience of fighting in the First World War in its name, resulting in a tortured and somewhat paradoxical and vacillating depiction of his country. England might be a 'darling Mother', but it is also a 'stern' and 'terrible' one that withholds its love yet, nevertheless, recognises and grieves the 'scars and haggard look of all that hell' inflicted on its children on its account. Gurney's oxymoronic 'dear taskmistress' encapsulates his highly conflicted view of a country he loves but, unlike Brooke, can never see in simplistically patriotic or nationalistic terms due to his acute awareness of the suffering imposed and endured on its behalf.

Gurney's poem, and other similarly complex and conflicted poems by him (e.g. 'Strange Service') and others, reveals the impact of the First World War on the

perception of England and sense of Englishness of the poets who fought in it and engaged it in their writing. The work of these poets delineates a broad trend that complicates prior perceptions of England, blending instinctive loyalty to their country with a profound sense of doubt about what they were fighting for. Between the 1914 of Brooke's sonnets and the 1917 of Gurney's, the reality of the war that the soldier poets experienced prompted significant changes in the way they perceived England and how they themselves stood in relation to it. England is no longer viewed through the indulgently patriotic lens of Brooke, who fails to comprehend, or at least glosses over entirely, the uglier side of war and his country's complicity in it: 'If I should die, think only this of me: / That there's some corner of a foreign field / That is forever England. There shall be / In that rich earth a richer dust concealed' ('The Soldier', 1–4). The dead soldier enriches the land simply by virtue of being English and sufficiently patriotic to fight, Brooke's emotive tribute failing to provide any convincing reason for England's superiority.

Of course, patriotism is not necessarily synonymous with belief in the superiority of one's country, with Brooke ultimately focusing more on England's virtues rather than asserting its predominance. Yet that predominance is still very much implied, with the foreign field eventually transformed into an 'English heaven' (14) at the poem's close. In contrast, Charles Hamilton Sorley writes: 'England – I am sick of the sound of the word. In training to fight for England, I am training to fight for that deliberative hypocrisy, that terrible middle-class sloth of outlook and appalling "imaginative indolence" that has marked us out from generation to generation' (1914, cited in Wilson, 'Introduction' to *Collected Poems*, 9). Sorley is under no illusions about the true nature of patriotic sacrifice: '"[S]erving one's country" is so unpicturesque and unheroic when it comes to the point. Spending a year in a beastly Territorial camp guarding telegraph wires has nothing poetical about it: nor very useful as far as I can see' (1914, cited in Wilson, *Charles Hamilton Sorley: A*

Biography 157)[1]. Serving one's country is no longer associated with glory and glamour, and even its practical purpose is questioned. This trend represented by the soldier poets stands in contrast to the prevailing view of the war in its initial stages.

Those early stages of the war were, instead, associated with more straightforward notions of nationalism, patriotism, honour and sacrifice, as a stereotypical call to arms from then-Poet Laureate Robert Bridges demonstrates: 'Thou careless, awake! / Thou peacemaker, fight! / Stand England for honour / And God guard the Right!' ('"Wake Up, England!"', 1–4) It is taken for granted that England stands for 'honour' and 'Right' and has God on its side, with no disturbing undercurrents to complicate the equation. Many other prominent poets, including Rudyard Kipling and Thomas Hardy, wrote equally nationalistic poems unequivocally promoting the war effort and asserting England's moral pre-eminence, since, as Dominic Hibberd notes, '[l]ike the other belligerent peoples, the British were confident that they were on the side of religion and honour against a ruthless, evil enemy' (1990, 51). However, many of the prominent war poets who actually fought in the war were not as militantly unequivocal about associating England with honour and justice, despite demonstrating considerable loyalty to their country. George Parfitt observes, and subsequently challenges, the stereotype of the First World War poet – 'a handsome young officer who writes either about country and heroism (Rupert

[1] Strictly speaking, all these lines were written before Sorely actually saw battle. However, although Sorley's views of England and the war were clearly formed by then, and so not shaped by the war experience as directly as, for instance, Owen's, he may nevertheless be regarded as a precursor to the later war poets due to his unusual perspicacity. As Jean Moorcroft Wilson elaborates, '[i]t is important to remember that Sorley was "helplessly angry"... about war from the start, for it shows greater maturity and discernment than most of his contemporaries. Very few soldier-poets realized the futility of war at such an early stage' (*Charles Hamilton Sorley: A Biography* 157). It seems highly unlikely that direct war experience would have done anything but intensify his relatively objective and anti-nationalistic view of England.

Brooke) or about the horrors of trench and bombardment (Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon)' (13). Upon closer examination, many war poems, including some by Owen and Sassoon, tend to fall between these two extremes, confronting the horrors of trench warfare while also engaging notions of country and heroism, and presenting more nuanced and equivocal perspectives of England and English identity.

The trauma of the war, then, shaped a new shared vision of England in the war poets' minds, a vision expressed, implicitly or otherwise, in the poems written during the war. Although not all the war poets responded as strongly as Sorley to nationalistic propaganda, fighting in the trenches and battlefields caused them to view aspects of England in new ways notably different from those of their poetic predecessors. Two of these aspects most prominent in their work might be broadly referred to as 'Place' and 'People'. The trauma and graphic intensity of the war experience caused a wholesale change in how the war poets conceived of landscape and physical detail, not just of the immediate present but also of the recollected environment of home. Not only did the war compel them to re-create their war-torn surroundings in vivid, graphic detail, it also caused them to create equally vivid 'remembered' images of England as a place, with more realism and detail than the Georgian poetry that influenced them. England in the form of its people was also viewed differently than it was before the war, as the experience of suffering and causing injury and death caused a dilution of the war poets' sense of Englishness, due to a greater identification with all soldiers, not just those on their own side. What remained of their sense of English identity was also altered, as the camaraderie forged with their men, as well as the strong animosity some of them came to feel towards perceived callous civilians, caused them to view England primarily in the form of its fighting men overseas, rather than the civilians back home.

Yet, for all that is undoubtedly new about the way the war poets perceived England through the lens of the war, another key point is that their poetry is rooted in a fundamental conservatism that is not fully transcended. Whether it was the pressures of wartime responsibility and a corresponding desire to ameliorate the horrors of war that suppressed their originality and forced them back into the traditional past, with its connotations of security and stability (a possibility discussed briefly in the conclusion), or simply their largely middle-to-upper-class upbringings, the fact is that their poetry remains deeply conservative in at least two significant areas – class and language. Despite the comradeship and camaraderie many of the war poets shared with their men, even across classes and hierarchies, the traditional class system, as it existed back home, also existed in their minds and attitudes overseas. The language, forms, diction and imagery of most of their poems are also, despite some significant stylistic innovations, largely traditional and unadventurous, especially when compared with the incipient Modernist movement. The distinctiveness of the war poets' vision of England, while not insignificant, was still ultimately founded on a bedrock of previously-formed attitudes and perspectives that the war did little to shift.

A study of how the war experience shaped this new vision of England demonstrates a strong and significant causal link between the actual war conditions (e.g. prolonged living in mud and dirt, killing other human beings) experienced by the war poets and their perceptions of England. Such a study is important as it shows the impact of practical experience[2] on the shaping of a poetic vision, both individual and collective, something that has yet to be analysed in depth. Simon Featherstone discusses how the work of poets like Gurney and Owen 'adapts [previous discourses of nationhood] to the circumstances of the war' (31), and Martin Coyle examines

[2] As opposed to, for instance, reading about the war in newspapers or talking to veterans.

'what kind of social debate is going on in the poems of Sassoon, Owen, Rosenberg and Gurney, and how that debate relates to the limitations... as well as to the apparent conservatism... in the texts' (121). John Lucas offers a somewhat hard-hitting and unsentimental view of what he perceives as a flawed kind of Englishness inherent in some major poems, arguing that Owen, for instance, succumbed to an easy kind of pity – what Jon Silkin calls the '"sad shires" syndrome' (Silkin 1981, 63), or a turning away 'from any hard inspection of what those sad shires constitute' (Lucas 1986, 75). As Lucas elaborates, 'the bugles calling from sad shires imply an eternal reciprocity of tears that blocks off harder lines of enquiry – which in the end have to do with questions about what it is to be English. For underlying most of Owen's work is... a desperate desire to retain a belief in that Englishness out of which his poems come and to which they repeatedly return' (1986, 77). Yet even such illuminating studies about Englishness in First World War poetry (with perhaps the exception of Featherstone's) tend to focus more on the Englishness that, for better or worse, is already extant, rather than the changes to that Englishness that were more specifically brought about by the physical conditions of the war. Discussions that proceed in that direction usually adopt a broader or more general approach, such as Edna Longley's 'The Great War, history, and the English lyric', which argues among other things that 'the years 1914–18 "transformed" the English lyric more generally', and that Edward Thomas's 'complementary reworking of the lyric has been obscured because Thomas's poems are not trench poems (he was killed soon after reaching the Front) but "of the war" in a holistic sense that reflects back on trench poetry too' (58). It is that trench poetry that this study is more specifically concerned with, despite the potential limitations of such a categorisation.

Of course, a study of an entire genre of poetry, as opposed to one or two individual writers, has necessary limitations and qualifications. The most obvious shortcoming is that of number – Catherine Reilly's 1978 bibliography identifies 2,225

writers (xix) who experienced the war and published war poems, and who might thus be considered First World War poets. Since discussing a respectable proportion of that number would not be possible, this study is limited to the most prominent and frequently anthologised war poets – Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, Ivor Gurney, Edmund Blunden, Charles Hamilton Sorley, Edward Thomas and Robert Graves. The inclusion of Edward Thomas, as well as some poems by the others, leads to the most significant qualification – the time of writing of the poem. As a causal link between the poets' war experience and their new sense of England is propounded, it follows that the works used to support that link should have been written in the middle of their tours of duty, or at least not long after, and indeed most of them were[3]. However, exceptions have also been made, particularly with Thomas, who as Longley states wrote all his poems before going to fight in France in January 1917. Although, partly because of this, Thomas's 'war poems' do not engage directly with the war, his clear apprehension of its trauma, coupled with his obvious sensitivity, empathy and lack of susceptibility to easy nationalistic sentiment, would reasonably have produced in him a feeling similar, if attenuated, to that produced by fighting in the war itself. In addition, many of his poems were written after he had enlisted in the Artists' Rifles in July 1915 and thus obtained significant military training (as poems like 'Bugle Call' and 'Lights Out' suggest), and, as Silkin notes, 'he was writing almost up to the moment of his departure' (1972, 87) for France. As Silkin also avers, while few of his war poems 'can be identified as "war poems", in the way that most of Owen's can... on the other hand there are more

[3] For example, almost all the poems by Gurney discussed here are from his two published volumes (as opposed to unpublished poems only collected after his death), *Severn and Somme* (1917) and *War's Embers* (1919). Both volumes, as the dates suggest, contain poems almost exclusively written during the war period. Gurney explicitly states in his Preface to *Severn and Somme* that '[a]ll these verses were written in France, and in sound of the guns, save only two or three earlier pieces' ('Preface').

subtle, indirect ways of reflecting the nature of war' (1972, 86). Finally, at 36 in 1914, Thomas was significantly older than any of the other war poets, which would demonstrate that their collective vision of England had less to do with belonging to a similar age group or generation and more with the impact of the war experience on their collective psyche. Most of Blunden's poems discussed here, too, appeared at the end of his war memoir *Undertones of War*, published only in 1928. However, they are very much products of first-hand experience relived repeatedly in the poet's mind[4]. As with any study covering a fairly wide range of authors, generalisations and outliers are inevitable, as are slight repetitions of material.

This thesis argues, then, that the first-hand experience of fighting in the war caused significant changes to poetic perceptions of England. As suggested earlier, these changes can be divided into the two broad categories of 'Place' and 'People', and are discussed in that order. The final part, 'Conservatism', attempts to balance the previous two by showing that despite these changes to the war poets' collective vision of England, it is still a fundamentally conservative one, particularly in the areas of class and language. However, a brief overview of the pre-war British identity and the Georgian movement – the most prominent style of poetry written immediately prior to the war and the style most closely linked with the war poets – will first be required, in order to establish an idea of what the poetic sense of England was like before the war, and how it subsequently changed. The Georgian movement, and its realism in particular, served as a poetic template of sorts for some of the prominent war poets, and although they diverged from and developed it, it is still important to understand its essential features and limitations. The England of the Georgians could be said to represent the England that existed in the prevailing pre-war

[4] In his 'Preliminary' to the memoir, Blunden states that 'it was impossible not to look again, and to descry the ground, how thickly and innumerably yet it was strewn with the facts or notions of war experience. I must go over the ground again' (xii).

consciousness of the soon-to-be war poets and their contemporaries, before it was irrevocably altered by the trauma of the trenches.

Chapter 2

The Georgians and English History

As Linda Colley observes in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837*, the formation of 'British'[5] identity from 1707 to the start of the Victorian age in 1837 was determined by two related key elements – war and the 'Other' (5–6). British history, even pre-1707, can arguably be defined by the many wars fought against various opponents, for instance the multiple conflicts with France and Spain, the American Revolutionary War, and, as in Rudyard Kipling's 'The White Man's Burden', the 'savage wars of peace' (l.18) fought in the name of imperial expansion and domination. As a result, Britons shaped their identity not so much through introspection or looking inward, but rather by aligning themselves against what they were not – the other countries and peoples with which they were at war. Of course, Colley's thesis covers far more ground than that relatively straightforward idea alone, but it is still a core thread running through her book (Chapter 1, 'Protestants', in particular), and is explicitly stated in the Introduction: '[Britons] came to define themselves as a single people not because of any political or cultural consensus at home, but rather in reaction to the Other beyond their shores' (Colley 6). Hence the whole notion of 'Britishness' was 'superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and above all in response to conflict with the Other' (Ibid.), though of course other factors like religion also played a significant role in fostering British identity, and are also addressed in Colley's book. Despite the inevitable social conflicts within

[5] In this thesis 'England' can be viewed as a metonym of sorts for 'Britain'. Although several war poets had non-English heritage (Edward Thomas was largely Welsh, for instance), their most immediate identification was with England, as that was the country where they lived and which they fought for. Although they may have also identified themselves as 'British' in a wider sense, or Welsh, for instance, in a narrower one, there is little doubt of their strong attachment to England, and their overarching sense of Englishness.

Britain's borders, the external forces against which Britain's military power was arrayed were therefore sufficient to maintain a palpable, if somewhat protean, sense of British identity and solidarity back home.

Although Colley's analysis is primarily a historical one, the conclusions about national identity that it draws might also be pertinent to an analysis of poetry, as poetry could often be said to reflect prevailing national sentiments. According to John Lucas, after the revolution of 1688, which established a constitutional Protestant monarchy in England (1991, 11) and hence 'marks the beginning of England as a distinctively modern nation' (1991, 1), poets 'felt a special responsibility to identify nationhood in a manner that was new', and as the novel was not usually considered an art form until the middle of the nineteenth century 'novelists did not have the authority or responsibilities of poets' (Ibid.). If that claim is accepted, poetry, inadvertently or otherwise, may be considered a 'barometer' of national identity, reflecting the claim that English identity was determined primarily by external warfare and conflict with the Other. Although there was no major international conflict involving England between the 1830s and 1914 (except perhaps the Crimean War of 1853–6), that period saw the nation at the height of its imperial dominance overseas, and hence there was no shortage of the 'external element' for the nation to define itself against, as A.E. Housman suggests: 'And over the seas we were bidden / A country to take and to keep; / And far with the brave I have ridden, / And now with the brave I shall sleep' ('Lancer', 4–8). The brave, of course, were only made brave by their overseas conquests, which defined their identity as English to a significant extent. This phenomenon is also observable in the poetry of the Georgian

movement, perhaps the most prominent poetic movement in the years just prior to the war[6].

The Georgian movement produced a total of five 'Georgian Poetry' anthologies, the first published in 1912[7]. The movement incorporated and influenced some of the soon-to-be war poets, most notably Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke – in fact often regarded as one of the most prominent Georgian poets – although the war poets were to diverge from their Georgian roots in significant ways[8]. Despite its close links with the war poetry, Georgian poetry is different as far as expressions of national identity are concerned. Not only does it sustain the trope of the foreign Other with a distinctly 'Orientalist' strain that exaggerates differences between England and foreign lands like India, it also resists a more introspective examination of English identity by employing pastoral symbols and expressions of superficial emotion, creating a stereotypically bucolic image of England that does not go beyond these qualities. The remainder of this chapter will examine these and other central features of Georgian poetry, and the overall picture of Englishness that they form, especially in relation to war poetry.

---

[6] Of course, the pre-war poetic landscape was also dominated by prominent figures like A.E. Housman, Rudyard Kipling and Thomas Hardy, but the Georgians are the ones most closely associated with preceding and shaping the First World War poets.

[7] As this was the only volume to include only poetry from the pre-war years (1911–12), only poems from this volume are considered here.

[8] Martin Stephen provides a fairly comprehensive overview of the influence of the Georgians on the First World War poets. According to him 'the Georgians could not have done a better job of preparing for the First World War if they had been invented for that purpose. They took on board a group of young poets and told them that they could write with total honesty about whatever experience came to them', and gave poets like Edward Thomas and Edmund Blunden 'a vision of nature that allowed the poet to see the war in perspective' (31).

Georgian poetry may, broadly speaking, be distinguished by two key opposing qualities – an emphasis on realism, physical detail and verisimilitude, and what might be termed a certain 'weak Romanticism' – in the words of L. Hugh Moore, Jr, a pervading 'taste for the lushly romantic and the insipidly pastoral' (199). According to Myron Simon, Georgian realism depends on the poet 'keep[ing] his eye upon the object itself... [and] maintain[ing] direct contact with experience' (130); hence Georgian poetry 'wished to engage reality item by item: to feel its shapes and textures, to perceive its distinctive forms, to grasp its essential meanings as fully and as directly as their sensibilities would allow' (Simon 131). This eye for the detail and form of experiential reality is evident in Walter de la Mare's 'Miss Loo', a vivid evocation of the memory of a specific person and scene: 'And she with gaze of vacancy, / And large hands folded on the tray, / Musing the afternoon away; / Her satin bosom heaving slow / With sighs that softly ebb and flow' (18–22). The poet's eye moves swiftly and observantly over the remembered details, from the woman's eyes, hands and breathing to the immediate physical surroundings – the afternoon, the 'drowsy summer' (l.9) and the 'sunshine in a pool' (l.11). Likewise, Wilfrid Wilson Gibson's description of a captured hare centres on sensation and keen observation: 'My hands were hot upon a hare, / Half-strangled, struggling in a snare – / My knuckles at her warm wind-pipe – / When suddenly, her eyes shot back, / Big, fearful, staggering and black' ('The Hare', 1–5). As Martin Stephen observes, '[t]he Georgians were only prepared to write about what they knew and had experienced personally' (29), and the poet's lines certainly suggest he is writing from direct experience. This dedication to faithful depictions of the world and its minutiae, however banal or unpleasant, is thus a significant feature of Georgian poetry, and a likely inspiration for some of the graphic and realistic war poetry that was to follow.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Georgian realism is the social consciousness evinced in some poems – again, also a prominent quality of some war

poetry, particularly that of Owen and Sassoon. As the Georgians 'connected realism with an interest in social justice and a concern for the lowly, the poor and the victimized' (Moore, Jr, 200), these poems present graphic, largely unsentimental descriptions of poverty, isolation and suffering, usually via focus on a single individual. William H. Davies's 'The Heap of Rags' depicts the wretched state of a dehumanised mendicant, whose gender is not even clearly discernible:

> One night when I went down
> Thames' side, in London Town,
> A heap of rags saw I,
> And sat me down close by.
> That thing could shout and bawl,
> But showed no face at all;
> :
> Yet that poor thing, I know,
> Had neither friend nor foe;
> Its blessing or its curse
> Made no one better or worse.
>
> (1–6; 19–22)

Davies's choice of subject and its depiction exemplifies the principles of realism, particularly the inclusion of 'details previously regarded as too nasty or coarse for poetry'[9] (Moore, Jr, 200), and his concern for the voiceless and marginalised

[9] However, the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821–67) was also responsible for introducing such details into poetry, particularly in his 1857 volume *Les Fleurs du mal*. Baudelaire creates a 'theatre of violence' featuring 'criminal acts of murder and suicide, verbal

mendicant foreshadows that of Sassoon and Owen for the soldiers on whose behalf they felt compelled to speak. Gibson's 'Geraniums' also espouses a similar theme, this time focusing on an old, sick flower peddler and the gulf between her penury and illness and the poet's position of relative privilege: 'These flowers are mine: while somewhere out of sight / In some black-throated alley's stench and heat, / Oblivious of the racket of the street, / A poor old weary woman lies in bed' (4–7). Just as the poppy in Isaac Rosenberg's 'Break of Day in the Trenches' is linked to the poet's life, the geraniums the poet has bought here are linked to the old flower seller's: 'And yet to-morrow will these blooms be dead / With all their lively beauty; and to-morrow / May end the light lusts and the heavy sorrow / Of that old body with the nodding head' (19–22). Rosenberg's poppy, 'a little white with the dust' (26), foreshadows his own death, just as the dying geraniums foreshadow the old woman's. Realism, besides being a key element in the English poetry written just before the war, was thus also an important influence on the later war poetry.

Yet the virtues of realism and its related principles are offset by the weak Romantic elements that also suffuse Georgian poetry and arguably played a substantial part in the decline of its critical reputation. As John H. Johnston notes, '[a]lthough the first volume of *Georgian Poetry* contained two brief realistic selections... there could be no doubt that the "new" poetry took its main inspiration from traditional pastoral themes and materials' (4). James Reeves summarises some Georgian shortcomings as 'the use of imprecise diction and facile rhythm; sentimentality of outlook; trivial, and even downright commonplace themes' (xvii), as well as '[e]asy sentiment, an indifferent eye on the object (imprecise imagery), languor, and studied homeliness of expression' (xviii). The affectedly archaic diction

---

threats and accusations and the solitary melancholy of illness, marginalisation and generalised suffering' (Schlossman 177).

and ‘poeticisms’, self-indulgent revelling in nature and pastoral scenes for no apparent purpose, and vague, sentimentalised descriptions of such scenes stand in stark opposition to the detailed depictions of material reality that the Georgians also espoused. Davies’s ‘The Kingfisher’, perhaps one of the better-known Georgian poems[10], displays many of the weak Romantic traits that pervade such poetry: ‘It was the Rainbow gave thee birth, / And left thee all her lovely hues; / And, as her mother’s name was Tears, / So runs it in thy blood to choose / For haunts the lonely pools’ (1–5). How the kingfisher could have ‘Tears’ for a mother, for instance, is not explained; the line seems to have been included only for effect. Even the more realistic, socially aware poems are not entirely immune – ‘The Heap of Rags’ ends as the poem following it in the anthology, ‘The Kingfisher’, begins, with a rainbow: ‘So many showers and not / One rainbow in the lot; / Too many bitter fears / To make a pearl from tears’ (27–30). The poet almost seems to regret being unable to continue his Romantic metaphors. Other examples include Harold Monro’s ‘Child of Dawn’ – ‘O gentle vision in the dawn: / My spirit over faint cool water glides, / Child of the day / To thee’ (1–4) – and Edmund Beale Sargant’s ‘The Cukoo Wood’: ‘Cukoo, are you calling me, / Or is it a voice of wizardry? / In these woodlands I am lost, / From glade to glade of flowers tost’ (1–4). Many Georgian poets thus ‘did not have a strength of experience to match the strength of their lyric impulse’, demonstrating ‘what T.S. Eliot in another context described as an emotion in excess of the known facts: their subject matter is simply not able to bear the load of emotion they place on it’ (Stephen 30). These expressions of emotion lacking a real source, combined with a diluted pastoral vein, significantly attenuate the qualities and impact of realism, and more pertinently restrict the potential for a more profound or complex development of

[10] And, incidentally, printed alongside ‘The Heap of Rags’ in the anthology, an editorial choice that, inadvertently or otherwise, emphasises the contrast between these conflicting Georgian qualities.

national identity by presenting an aesthetically pleasing but superficial and unrealistic image of a pastoral England.

Also notable in some Georgian poems is a fascination with the 'Oriental' and exotic – again, perhaps another, slightly more specific attempt to imitate the poetry of the Romantics, like Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan'. As with the other weak Romantic qualities, such depictions of foreign shores are usually stereotypical and one-dimensional. De la Mare's 'Arabia' depicts an 'Orientalised' Eastern land of mystery and wonder, the distant 'shades of Arabia, / Where the Princes ride at noon, / 'Mid the verdurous vales and thickets, / Under the ghost of the moon' (1–4). 'The Sale of Saint Thomas', a short verse play by Lascelles Abercrombie, differs from de la Mare's poem in form, language and style as it attempts to present an extended psychological insight into the mind of the titular, reluctant missionary bound for India. The poet's attempts at realism, vis-à-vis that psychological insight and the often graphic descriptions, are evident, though perhaps not entirely successful. Yet at its core the play is just as straightforwardly and exaggeratedly 'Oriental' with its extended and detailed (and, by today's standards, probably highly racist) descriptions of India as a barbarous and lascivious land full of flies, torture and moral and physical decay: 'For human flesh there breeds as furiously / As the green things and the cattle; and it is all, / All this enormity of measureless folk, / Penn'd in a land so close to the devil's reign / The very apes have faith in him' (427–31). Such is the grotesque and unrealistic nature of this depiction of India as a savage and inhuman place that it is in fact possible that the poet is being satirical or ironic, especially given the slight 'twist' ending of the play, in which the missionary, in slightly comical fashion, loses his nerve and renounces his mission. There is no unequivocal evidence of this, however. Thus the tropes of 'exoticism' and adventure, in their most simplistic form, are also prominent in Georgian poetry, continuing the trend of Englishmen defining themselves against a foreign 'Other', as propounded by Colley.

Saint Thomas has ‘my single heart / To seize into the order of its beat / All the strange blood of India, my brain / To lord the dark thought of that tann’d mankind!’ (357–60), heavily implying his own ‘normal’ blood, ‘light’ thoughts and ‘non-tann’d’ skin without explicitly mentioning any of it.

Of course, there are also differences between the constructions of ‘Oriental/Asian’ otherness and ‘European’ otherness, as the Orient was, in some fundamental ways, perhaps even more ‘othered’ than Europe and America. In his seminal *Orientalism*, Edward Said identifies the cultural hegemony of ‘a collective notion identifying “us” Europeans as against all “those” non-Europeans’, and the associated ‘idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures’ (7). Said also highlights the unrealistically polarised and vacillating depictions of the Orient. On one hand, it was perceived as ‘a salutary *dérangement* of... European habits of mind and spirit... [and] overvalued for its pantheism, its spirituality, its stability, its longevity, its primitivity, and so forth’, and on the other it ‘appeared lamentably under-humanized, antidemocratic, backward, barbaric, and so forth’ (Said 150). ‘Arabia’ and ‘The Sale of Saint Thomas’ aptly demonstrate, respectively, these two extreme portrayals, both of which are made from positions of implied superiority.

In contrast, the ‘othering’ of ‘fellow’ Europeans by the British was somewhat more nuanced, as demonstrated by Colley. For example, Britain’s relationship with France was a complex one, founded less on absolute domination (as with India) than competition and conflict – religious, economic and cultural, among other aspects. As such, the ‘othering’ of the French was based less on a sense of ignorant superiority and condescension than fear of a greater rival. As Colley avers, France ‘had a larger population and a much bigger land mass than Great Britain. It was its greatest commercial and imperial rival. It possessed a more powerful army which regularly

showed itself able to conquer large tracts of Europe. And it was a Catholic state' (25). Britain was thus defining itself, consciously or otherwise, against a superior fellow European power, which despite all the differences still had more in common with it than the comparatively remote Orient – the British upper classes, for instance, indulged in 'rampant Francophilia' in many facets of their private lives, which in turn led to accusations of corruption by British writers (Colley 88). As a result of these ambiguous attitudes, the British came to imagine the French 'as their vile opposites, as Hyde to their Jekyll' (Colley 368), at once their polar opposites and an integral part of them. This greater racial and cultural proximity also contributed to more complex perceptions of America – a colony like India, but unlike India a colony comprising British settlers. Thus Americans were not viewed through the same binaristic lens as their Indian counterparts, but instead as 'a mysterious and paradoxical people, physically distant but culturally close, engagingly similar yet irritatingly different' (Colley 134). Oriental 'othering', in Said's words, 'reduce[s] the Orient to a kind of human flatness, which expose[s] its characteristics easily to scrutiny and remove[s] from it its complicating humanity' (150), a less straightforward feat when Europeans are on the other end.

On the whole, then, the Georgians present an overall picture of dissipated Englishness, in a body of work that seems very identifiably yet very superficially English, partly due to the extensive use of generic elements like fields, lakes, cuckoos and kingfishers. Georgian realism, despite (or because of) its virtues, perhaps focuses too much on the *physical* details of reality at the expense of a more introspective consideration of Englishness, since it is ultimately concerned with truth and fidelity to the material world, and not with notions of national identity or

belonging. In addition, the Georgians' rejection of Victorian styles and mores[11], and of the incipient Modernist movement, meant that their work harked back to an earlier time – that of the Romantics. Stephen succinctly describes the relationship between the war poets, the Georgians and the Romantics by saying that '[a]ll the major war poets were brought up as members of an essentially Romantic tradition of writing, and the Georgian poets are the clearest symbol of that type of poetry' (200). As a result the realist ideals of fidelity to physical experience and material reality are offset by the weak Romantic elements that reduce the overall effectiveness of the poetry with meaningless poeticisms, stock idyllic landscapes and superficial expressions of feeling, and preclude more complex examinations of English identity. Brooke's famous 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester', exemplifies many of these qualities with its detailed yet insouciant descriptions of natural landscapes, and its humorously exaggerated yearning for England and Grantchester: 'God! I will pack, and take a train, / And get me to England once again! / For England's the one land, I know, / Where men with Splendid Hearts may go' (72–5). While Brooke's tone is jovial, his nostalgia for England and 'men with Splendid Hearts' appears strong and sincere, as in his more elegiac war sonnets. As in those sonnets, England is also conceived of here in the simplest and most uncomplicated terms.

Georgian poetry, insofar as it may be considered representative of the poetry being written immediately prior to the outbreak of the war, can thus be regarded as an intermediate stage that adumbrates the work of the soldier poets but does not notably alter previous conceptions of English identity as, in the opinion of George Parfitt, the Georgians 'are not greatly concerned with the nation or the national past' (11). According to Reeves, '[t]he celebration of England, whether at peace or at war,

[11] Reeves notes the Georgian 'mistrust of rhetoric, of the grand Victorian manner, of grandiose themes', and how it led to the Georgians' 'pedestrian tendency... which too often leads to triviality, complacency, and the avoidance of strong personal feeling' (xvii).

became a principal aim of Georgian poetry' (xv), and it does not go beyond that celebratory position, with the attendant subject-matter of '[t]he English countryside, English crafts, and English sports' (Ibid.). The trope of the Other also augmented this superficial sense of Englishness. Georgian realism, while influential to the war poets, is inconsistently executed, and so '[a]t their best, the Georgians show the desire to respond to the actuality of the early twentieth century without the capacity to render this adequately in verse. There is an ubiquitous tendency to slide off in the direction of the pretty' (Parfitt 12). That preoccupation with the pretty results in a limited and uncomplicated view of England, a view that would only change in the trenches and battlefields themselves.

Chapter 3

Place

Soldiers in the trenches of the First World War usually had to endure an extended period of living in dirt and soil. Much prominent First World War poetry depicts the harsh conditions in the trenches with descriptive and sensory fidelity, as in Siegfried Sassoon's 'Trench Duty': 'I blunder through the splashing mirk; and then / Hear the gruff muttering voices of the men / Crouching in cabins candle-chinked with light' (3–5). Visual, aural and tactile sensations combine in a few evocative lines. Although the realism of the war poets partly developed from the realist principles of Georgian poetry, the war poets refined those principles, reducing the weak Romantic and 'Oriental' elements and creating a more focused realism that conveyed the wartime experience of the soldiers vividly and effectively. As Dominic Hibberd avers, Wilfred Owen's 'best poems are matters of experience, experience of a kind which few poets have had to endure' (1979, 40). That rare experience of living in the trenches, in constant contact with mud and grime and exposed to the elements, was the catalyst for the enhanced realism of the poetry that followed. The vivid physical descriptions of the experience of warfare and living so close to the earth are therefore almost stereotypical qualities of prominent First World War poetry. This is evident in poems like Owen's 'Exposure': 'We only know war lasts, rain soaks and clouds sag stormy. / Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army / Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of gray' (12–4). The natural elements surrounding the trenches are shown to compose the soldiers' entire world, to the point that the weather is personified as a 'melancholy army' that attacks them.

Yet this change in how the war poets viewed and recorded their reality was not restricted to their own military environment of trenches, battlefields and ruined landscapes, but also extended to how they conceived of the imagined country they

were supposed to be fighting for. While no two poets are exactly alike in style, theme and focus, a fairly consistent image of England's landscape emerges from their writing – an image of a rural, country-based England that is hardly original. Martin Wiener explicates the 'myth of an England essentially rural and essentially unchanging' (55), which arose despite (or because of) the fact that '[b]y 1851, more than half the population lived in towns, and England had become the world's first major urban nation' (47). Essentially, the rural myth was a reaction against urbanism, as '[o]ut of the midst of the new urban society "ruralism" rose up reborn' (Ibid.). Likewise, John Lucas notes that poets 'made the England of city life invisible', and that '[t]o be English was not to be English', since '[b]y the end of the nineteenth century most English people lived in cities' (1991, 9). The war poets, like the Georgians, espoused this myth of a pastoral England to a considerable extent, imagining an England based on nostalgia and tradition. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, their England is also grounded in realism, specificity and physical detail. Although they tended to view England in fairly idealised terms, they did not, as the Georgians did, present it with correspondingly vague or superficial descriptions, but emphasised material realism to a greater extent than the Georgians. In short, England became as vivid and realistic an entity as the trench and battlefield conditions they had to endure and the ruined landscapes they were, at least for the time being, a part of. Despite their individual differences, the new England they conceived of is sufficiently widely diffused to constitute a shared vision. The causal link between the experience of trench warfare and this shared vision of a vivid England is evident in the similarity of some descriptions of typical trench conditions and depictions of England.

Poetic depictions of the trenches and dug-outs are usually highly visual, and emphasise the proximity and copiousness of dirt and sludge. In 'The Sentry', Owen describes how 'Rain, guttering down in waterfalls of slime, / Kept slush waist-high and rising hour by hour, / And choked the steps too thick with clay to climb' (4–6).

The emphasis is not just on the visually arresting 'slime', 'slush', and thick 'clay', but how it all 'gutter[s] down in waterfalls', is 'waist-high and rising', and chokes the steps to the extent that escape is impossible, highlighting the overwhelming nature of the onslaught and creating a strong sense of claustrophobia. Although primarily visual, the overall experience is also made more palpable by adjectives like 'waist-high' and 'choked'. This 'visual-experiential' mode is also evident in one of Owen's rare[12] descriptions of specific English scenery in 'Disabled', a poem probably written shortly after 'The Sentry'[13]: 'About this time Town used to swing so gay / When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees, / And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim' (7–9). Again, the description is mainly visual, with the 'gay' town, 'glow-lamps', 'light blue trees' (a fairly precise shade of colour) and lovely glances of girls. Yet mixed in with that is the heightened sensuousness that goes beyond the visual, with, again, the gayness of the town, the 'bud[ding]' of the lamps, and the synaesthesia of 'the air grew dim'. Despite the very different settings, both descriptions are stylistically similar in their accumulated visual detail and evocation of a specific sensory experience.

A comparison across poets also reveals notable similarities between their re-creations of visual and sensory aspects of the trench experience and English landscapes. In 'The Zonnebeke Road', Edmund Blunden's view of a war-torn French landscape from the trenches closely parallels Sassoon's depiction of the peaceful Sussex countryside in 'Break of Day'. Blunden describes the ruined landscape's

[12] Rare in the sense of intimate, detailed physical descriptions of England; Owen often presents England as a safe haven, but seldom describes it very intimately or in very physical terms.

[13] Owen mentions the sentry incident in a letter dated 16 January 1917 (*Selected Letters* 214); he mentions showing Robert Graves his 'longish war-piece "Disabled"' in a letter dated 14 October 1917 (*Selected Letters* 283).

‘gargoyle shriek’ (26) and ‘wretched wire before the village line / [That] [r]attles like rusty brambles or dead bine, / And there the daylight oozes into dun; / Black pillars, those are trees where roadways run’ (27–30). Sassoon’s poem depicts ‘brambled fences’ (24) and ‘glimmering fields with harvest piled in sheaves, / And tree-tops dark against the stars grown pale; / Then, clear and shrill, a distant farm-cock crows (25–7). Unlike the dissimilar settings in Owen’s poems above, the settings described by these two poets are correspondent in that both are panoramic landscapes with sharp physical detail and changing lighting, Blunden’s ominously fading from view as night falls and Sassoon’s placidly materialising as morning breaks. In both poems, the light is something observed and specific, not just a vague idea of light. The poets’ visual and aural apprehensions of the landscapes are also quite similar, as are the descriptors used – ‘bramble’ is common to both poems, while Blunden’s ‘Black pillars, those are trees where roadways run’ corresponds to Sassoon’s ‘tree-tops dark against the stars’. Aurally, Blunden’s ‘gargoyle shriek’ matches Sassoon’s ‘a distant farm-cock crows’. Both poets also employ personification elsewhere in their poems, Blunden’s ‘the stones themselves must flinch’ (21) corresponding to Sassoon’s ‘red, sleepy sun’ (47). The shared trench experience seems to have shaped the poetic perspectives and techniques of individual men in a similar way.

Finally, even more specific parallels, between similar aspects of different landscapes, can sometimes be drawn. Sassoon’s presentation of the wind in the trenches, for instance, mirrors Ivor Gurney’s description of the wind in Gloucestershire. Both versions are not only visual-experiential but, as with the examples of personification above, also endow the wind with distinctly human qualities, as if the wind itself were a soldier or man of violence. Sassoon’s version of the wind, in ‘A Working Party’, ‘came posting by with chilly gusts / And buffeting at corners, piping thin / And dreary through the crannies’ (20–2). Verbs like ‘posting’, ‘buffeting’, ‘piping’, and the adverb ‘dreary’ also give it the restless and slightly

threatening demeanour of an enemy soldier in the trenches. Likewise, Gurney visualises the wind in his native district as a violent, vaguely human entity:

> Thick lie in Gloucester orchards now
> Apples the Severn wind
> With rough play tore from the tossing
> Branches, and left behind
> Leaves strewn on pastures, blown in hedges,
> And by the roadway lined.
>
> ('Ypres-Minsterworth', 1–6)

Gurney's description of the wind, like Sassoon's, combines distinctive realism and human qualities ('rough play'; 'tore'), and in addition emphasises the results of the wind's violence, the apples and strewn leaves possibly serving as a metaphor for fallen soldiers. The trench experience, then, seems to have caused an overall change in how the war poets conceived of landscape and physical detail, not just of the immediate environment of the war but also of the recollected environment of home.

However, the above comparisons only serve to establish a causal link in a general sense, demonstrating how the trenches pervaded the war poets' perceptions of their native landscapes. More importantly, the emotions and feelings that the trench experience created, or at least augmented, in the war poets determined the specific tenor of their vision of home. For instance, Gurney's strong attachment to and affectionate feelings for his native Gloucestershire – particularly significant in the less mobile era of greater local sensibilities, when people were more rooted to their local environment – were probably enhanced by the vastly different conditions in the

trenches. This resulted in a powerful and dominant nostalgia that in turn shaped his construction of England, making it effectively synonymous with Gloucestershire and weaving detailed and specific English landscapes and memories into the experience of France. Also significant to some poets' specific visions of England is the sense of morality and purpose instilled by the trench experience. Sassoon, perhaps the most prominent 'anti-war' poet, presents a stereotypically idealised and bucolic, yet clearly defined, England that is often contrasted with the squalor of the trenches, in no small part because of his well-publicised agenda to end the war. The rest of this chapter will examine two significant tropes that most clearly define the poets' conception of place, and the feelings and circumstances that shaped these tropes.

First, what might be loosely termed the 'Overseas England' trope is apparent, more obviously and directly in the poetry of Gurney, Blunden and Edward Thomas, but also obliquely in the work of Isaac Rosenberg, perhaps the most distinctive war poet in terms of style and focus. Broadly speaking, the heightened nostalgia and increased value placed on the threatened landscapes of home caused the poets to 'transplant' England to their military environs – usually France or Belgium – and re-create it there in vivid, heightened detail. This vision of England, as previously noted, is largely rural and country-based. Second, the trench conditions and trauma of the mutual slaughter provoked what might be referred to as a political mindset in Owen, Sassoon and (to a lesser extent) Charles Hamilton Sorley. This attitude resulted in a well-documented agenda to end the war for the sake of their fellow soldiers, another aspect of their work that will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. This agenda had a twofold effect on their vision of place – the enhanced physical realism as detailed above, usually aimed at civilians back home in an effort to make them understand the realities of the war, and a conception of England as a bucolic haven of peace and plenty that contrasts with the suffering of the soldiers overseas, again with the aim of emphasising the war's realities.

3.1 Transplanting England

Given the intensity and physical and emotional trauma of the battlefield and trench experience, it might be expected that the immediate environment of the war poets would be evoked more vividly in their work than the familiar but distant landscapes of England, and indeed their experiences in France and Belgium are recorded very realistically. Yet, less expectedly, the English landscape is evoked no less clearly in war poems set overseas. This English landscape does not exist entirely in a bubble, but is often juxtaposed with or superimposed over the French (and, in Blunden's case, Belgian too) landscape, an effect achieved most notably through the use of place-names and symbols of England. One of the key elements responsible for this phenomenon is the strong nostalgia engendered, at least in part, by the war experience, which caused the poets to hark back to an England untouched by the war without denying the reality of their surroundings and the war's impact. More specifically, this nostalgia shapes particular aspects of the poets' vision of England differently. Most simple and direct is the nostalgia for location, rooted in specific place-memories. This yearning for fairly specific English locales suffuses Gurney's work in particular, with memories of pastoral Gloucestershire made explicit: 'Spring comes soon to Maisemore / And spring comes sweet, / With bird-songs and blue skies, / On gay dancing feet' ('West Country', 1–4). The poets' physical displacement in France leads to a corresponding locational displacement of England in their work, with English locales and place-names being transported to and merged with the French landscape.

This locational melding is applied to a variety of settings, both man-made and natural. Gurney, perhaps the most straightforwardly nostalgic war poet, demonstrates this melding quite extensively in his poems. The poem 'The Estaminet'

is set in a French bar, with the scene given a specific French place-name and the French, rather than English term for 'bar': 'The crowd of us were drinking / One night in Riez Bailleul, / The glasses were a-clinking, / The estaminet was full' (1–2). Yet his view of the estaminet quickly changes to an English one as vivid reminiscences of 'Blighty' dominate his imagination: 'But yarns of girls in Blighty; / Vain, jolly, ugly, fair, / Standoffish, foolish, flighty – / And O! that we were there!' (9–12) Even more specifically, the poet goes on to visualise a specific inn in Gloucestershire, effectively superimposing it over his current location, the French estaminet transforming into an English inn with a recognisably English owner: '[A]n inn that Johnson / Does keep; the "Rising Sun." / His friends him call Jack Johnson, / He's Gloster's only one' (17–20). English places and landscapes are re-created in France as vividly as if the poet is seeing and experiencing them first-hand.

Besides man-made locations like the estaminet and inn, the pastoral world of England is also combined with the war-torn natural landscape of France. In Gurney's 'Maisemore', the landscapes and place-names of the two countries are blended in his verse to a considerable and sometimes confusing extent:

> And not a man of all of us,
> Marching across the bridge,
> Had thought how Home would linger
> In our hearts, as Maisemore Ridge.
>
> When the darkness downward hovers
> Making trees like German shadows,
> How our souls fly homing, homing
> Times and times to Maisemore meadows,

By Aubers ridge that Maisemore men
Have died in vain to hold....
The burning thought but once desires
Maisemore in morning gold!
(13–24)

Three countries are invoked in the above extract – Germany (albeit in a fairly token manner), France (Aubers ridge) and England (Maisemore). The force and clarity of Gurney's locational nostalgia and memories of Maisemore overwhelm the distinctions between England and France, almost forcing their identities together. The poem first invokes Maisemore Ridge, then, abruptly and confusingly (at least to those not familiar with both places), 'Aubers ridge that Maisemore men / Have died in vain to hold'. The location in France is integrated into the poet's dominant vision of his native county. This merging and the inevitable fault lines and inconsistencies it exposes suggest an attempt to reconcile the trauma of physical displacement with the indelible memories of a much-loved landscape – an attempt that inadvertently demonstrates the disjuncture between reality and idealised memory, and the impossibility of fully bridging that gap despite the poet's best efforts.

Yet locational nostalgia is not always manifested in such close integrations of the English and French landscapes. That disjuncture between reality and memory is sometimes intentionally made more acute, rather than minimised, when the former overwhelms the latter, as it inevitably does on occasion. Despite his flights of fancy into Gloucestershire, Gurney demonstrates an acute awareness of the distinctions between England and France, and memory and reality. When this occurs the landscapes of England and France are forced apart rather than merged. Most of 'The Fire Kindled', for instance, commemorates Gloucestershire with Gurney's characteristic mixture of detail and yearning: 'God, that I might see / Framilode once

again! / Redmarley, all renewed, / Shining after rain' (1–4). However, the vision ends abruptly and disconcertingly in the final stanza, with a sudden and pessimistic return to reality: 'Here we go sore of shoulder, / Sore of foot, by quiet streams; / But these are not my rivers…. / And these are useless dreams' (21–4). The poet's sense of alienation from being in a landscape that is not his is acute. 'June–To–Come' follows a similar pattern, with an invocation of the English countryside suddenly terminated by reality: 'This land…. And here's my dream / Irrevocably over' (23–4). 'Strange Service' presents the dichotomy in a more holistic and introspective manner, addressing England directly and emphasising the tenuousness and fragility of memories of it: 'Now these are memories only, and your skies and rushy sky-pools / Fragile mirrors easily broken by moving airs...' (13–4). Yet while the transition from memory to reality is not as abrupt, the conclusion is the same: 'Think on me too, O Mother, who wrest my soul to serve you / In strange and fearful ways beyond your encircling waters' (17–8). The reality of the 'strange and fearful' service the poet is compelled to give supersedes his idealistic vision of England. When attempts to reconcile reality and memory break down completely, England and France are driven even further apart, the poet's nostalgia unable to overcome its real surroundings and dissolving into resignation or despair.

Locational nostalgia can also be present without a high level of specificity or intensity. Some of Blunden's work, while also shaped by nostalgia, displays a more moderate and objective view of England than Gurney's. Gurney's poems cover both ends of the emotional spectrum, either merging England and France with nostalgia or divorcing them when reality overwhelms it. Blunden's might be said to cover the middle ground, maintaining a more measured and balanced relationship between England and France. Admittedly, Blunden's poetic view of England is based more on people than a sense of place (a view examined more fully in 'People'). England as a country is seldom invoked directly or explicitly as Blunden's emphasis, as far as

physical landscapes go, is on nature in general and its violation by war, in keeping with his description of himself in *Undertones of War* as 'a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat' (191). As Jon Silkin observes, his poetry 'does not have cohering themes, in the strict sense, so much as contexts and specific experiences. He writes of nature and war, or rather, of events within a rural pattern. Nature is made to contain war, as best it can, as the sanative framework of an otherwise disrupting experience' (1972, 102). The 'sanative framework' of nature and a 'rural pattern' takes precedence over a specifically English pastoral.

Nevertheless, Blunden's sense of England as a place is present, and some poems do attempt to impose English references, though with a more human slant, on the French and Belgian landscapes and place-names that form the backdrop of much of his work. 'Battalion in Rest' depicts the leisure activities of some English soldiers in the rural French or Belgian countryside in a distinctly English idiom: 'Some found an owl's nest in the hollow skull / Of the first pollard from the malthouse wall; / Some hurried through the swarming sedge / About the ballast pond's green edge' (1–4). The poem goes on to integrate England and France/Belgium in a more implicit and less obtrusive way than in Gurney's poems: 'The girls along the dykes of those moist miles / Went on raft boats to take their cows afield, / And eyes from many an English farm / Saw and owned the mode had charm' (7–10). The tacit approval of the eyes tuned to English scenery and farming methods establishes a subtle connection between English and French/Belgian landscapes, albeit through the medium of people. On the other hand, 'Pillbox[14]' establishes the disjuncture between England and France/Belgium. The poem focuses on a soldier, Sergeant Hoad, who dies after

[14] Like many of Blunden's poems discussed here, both 'Battalion in Rest' and 'Pillbox' were published in the poem collection at the end of *Undertones of War* (1928). However, unlike the other poems by Blunden they are not included in any anthology consulted for this thesis, being apparently more obscure.

being slightly wounded, presumably of shock (similar to Owen's soldier in 'The Dead-Beat'). The entire poem is steeped in Englishness, with the distinctly English surnames (Hoad, Worley), diction ('*Bluffer, you've a blighty, man!*' [9]) and, more pertinently, a specific locational reference to England: 'All in the pillbox urged him, here began / His freedom: *Think of Eastbourne and your dad*' (10–11). England is configured as a distinctly separate place of liberty and family, an impression strengthened by 'The ship of Charon over channel bore him' (16), with 'channel' a possible reference to the English Channel, as a subtle play on words. Blunden's nostalgia for England, while definitely present and reflected in his strong links to English pastoral, is thus more muted and balanced than Gurney's, a probable result of his overriding affection for nature and all pastoral landscapes, not merely English ones.

Tradition, in the sense of a long-standing and immutable (at least from the poets' perspectives) national identity, is another prominent factor in the war poets' nostalgia and their resultant constructions of English landscapes. As with nostalgia for place, nostalgia for tradition results in a detailed re-creation of rural England in France, but usually in a less specific and more sweeping manner, and with less emphasis on specific place-memories. This is particularly noticeable in Gurney's poetry, as his nostalgia for tradition results in simple references to 'England' rather than Gloucestershire or associated place-names. 'Strange Service', as already discussed, addresses only England, highlights the unstable nature of memory, and invokes England's hills, 'tiny knolls and orchards' (10), and 'shy and tiny streamlets' (11) instead of more specific pastoral scenes like Maisemore or Framilode. As memory proves unreliable, Gurney shifts the location of his imagined England from the mind to another place: 'In my deep heart for ever goes on your daily being, / And uses consecrate' (15–6). While Gurney's memories of Gloucestershire may be intense, this invocation of England as an enduring entity and home perhaps stems

from an even deeper and more visceral emotion. Notably, most of his nostalgic poems about Gloucestershire do not explicitly invoke the heart but instead focus on the mind and the memories contained within, though of course memory and feeling are also connected. That feeling, however, seems to be further enhanced when nostalgia for tradition is invoked.

This greater emphasis on the deeper emotion stirred by such nostalgia is evident in Gurney's lengthy poem 'Spring. Rouen, May 1917'. While the setting is still France and the poet's thoughts are about England, no attempt is made to merge the two landscapes or reconcile reality and memory. Instead, the distinction between the two countries is stressed from the beginning – 'All loveliness of France is as a husk' (21), and the shore of France is 'French and set apart for ever' (33). The whole poem is a paean to unreachable England, whose landscape is configured in more sombre, stately terms than Gloucestershire:

> To England's royal grace and dignity,
> To England's changing skies, rich greenery,
> High strength controlled, queenly serenity,
> Inviolate kept by her confederate sea
> And hearts resolved to every sacrifice.
>
> (57–61)

Gurney seems to invoke the traditional Britannia trope with his images of sea and island, and personification of England as a 'she'[15]. His nostalgia for the idea of an

[15] A trope found in poems and songs like James Thomson's 'Rule, Britannia!', in which England is conceived of as a 'Blest Isle! With matchless beauty crown'd, / And manly hearts to guard the fair' (33–4).

enduring, ‘inviolate’ island home, rather than for specific Gloucestershire settings (though of course the two are not incompatible), results in a more panoramic and expansive depiction of the English landscape, and suggests a deeper emotional connection with national ideals that goes beyond location.

The notion of an immutable homeland may also take more ambiguous forms. Although Thomas’s work appears to celebrate the English countryside as much as Gurney’s, Thomas’s view of England’s standing in the world and among its subjects, especially in the midst of war, is more introspective and less emotionally committed. ‘This is No Case of Petty Right or Wrong’, while not containing much in the way of English landscapes, is his clearest statement about the war: ‘I hate not Germans, nor grow hot / With love of Englishmen, to please newspapers’ (3–4); ‘But I have not to choose between the two, / Or between justice and injustice’ (8–9). The poem maintains a balanced perspective throughout, rejecting black-and-white nationalistic discourse and ending on a note of highly qualified loyalty: ‘The ages made her that made us from dust: / She is all we know and live by, and we trust / She is good and must endure, loving her so: / And as we love ourselves we hate her foe’ (25–6). His dedication to England seems to be predicated on the simple fact that he himself is English, and hence obliged to love England at least partly out of self-interest, despite knowing that it is far from guiltless in the grander scheme of things: ‘I am one in crying, God save England, lest / We lose what never slaves and cattle blessed’ (23–4). England as a place may be immutable, but its longevity is founded at least partly on ignoble practices like slavery. Thomas’s nostalgia, if it could be called thus, is a divided and self-aware one, as his love for his country is mixed with an acute apprehension of the unsavoury causes of it.

The effects of such ambiguous nostalgia on depictions of English landscapes are clear in Thomas’s ‘Roads’, a lengthy celebration of the endless continuity of

roads, which ‘go on / While we forget, and are / Forgotten’ (5–7). Thomas’s deep affection for roads and the rural landscapes they pass through is evident: ‘I love roads’ (1); ‘The hill road wet with rain / In the sun would not gleam / Like a winding stream / If we trod it not again’ (13–6). Although there is less physical detail than in some of his other poems, the road is presented as a mystical, almost living entity that endures in a dreamlike, mysterious way: ‘They are lonely / While we sleep’ (17–8); ‘From dawn’s twilight / And all the clouds like sheep / On the mountains of sleep / They wind into the night’ (21–4). Though less overtly patriotic than Gurney’s poems, ‘Roads’, with its central image of an endless path going on forever, contains the same sense of a unique, enduring tradition that will never fade. Yet, as with ‘This is No Case of Petty Right or Wrong’, the poem is also shot through with qualifications and balances that hint at the darker side of the landscape and prevent the poem from becoming a straightforward paean to England: ‘The next turn may reveal / Heaven: upon the crest / The close pine clump, at rest / And black, may Hell conceal’ (25–8). The road may lead to Heaven, but equally to Hell too. The poem celebrates the English landscape, but the sense of uncertainty, probably heightened by the war, is also present, the menace of something palpable but unseen lurking beneath the natural beauty.

Most significantly, ‘Roads’ hinges on a single, loaded reference to France and the war near the end: ‘Now all roads lead to France, / And heavy is the tread / Of the living, but the dead / Returning lightly dance’ (53–6). The metrical emphasis on ‘Now all...’ firmly situates the poem and its depicted landscape in the present reality, emphasising the real impact, however oblique, of the war and how it has fundamentally altered Thomas’s perspective of the landscape. ‘[T]he dead’ from France, not the road itself, are the main subject of his thoughts at the poem’s close:

Whatever the road bring
To me or take from me,
They keep me company
With their pattering,

Crowding the solitude
Of the loops over the downs,
Hushing the roar of towns
And their brief multitude.
(57–64)

The English landscape, whether it is the rural beauty of 'the loops over the downs' or the busy 'roar of towns', is now infused with the war and its victims in the poet's mind, to the extent of being crowded out or hushed. The war has permeated his consciousness, leaving him unable to appreciate the landscape with a purely indulgent eye. Thus his heightened awareness of the war's depredations, combined with his strong sense of place and nostalgia for tradition, results in an ambiguous vision of England that strives for an overarching objectivity while still maintaining a sense of loyalty and devotion.

This objectivity is also present, in an even greater degree, in poetry that eschews national particularities for a universal and historically panoramic vision. Unlike the previous poets, Rosenberg is not motivated by nostalgia for his homeland or any definitive sense of Englishness. His poetic philosophy is summed up in his own words: 'I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself into poetry later on' (*Collected Works* 373). Rosenberg's emphasis is on immediate experience and one's 'saturation' in it, with nostalgia not an influencing

factor. As a result of this England, especially as a physical entity, goes largely unmentioned in his work. Even when England is explicitly invoked, it is implied that England is a land of succour that is completely alien to the soldiers in France[16], as in 'The Dying Soldier', in which a soldier begs for '"[w]ater–water–O water / For one of England's dying sons"' (7–8). However, he is told '"We cannot give you water / Were all England in your breath"' (9–10), and subsequently 'moan[s] and swoon[s] to death' (12). The soldier's sense of alienation and dislocation from England as a homeland is clear, and his 'swooning' to death is a possible ironic mockery of the traditional Romantic lover, who here dies not from a surfeit of love or sensation (as in John Keats's 'Bright Star') but abject deprivation.

Yet, while England as a place is not an obvious trope in Rosenberg's work, this very occlusion of the English landscape paradoxically suggests a vision of England in some poems that, while less vivid for being largely unseen, is at least strongly implied. Rosenberg's poetic techniques are central to this. 'The Dying Soldier', for instance, only contains two references to England and none to any specific place or landscape, but the antithesis it sets up between the dying soldier and his homeland conjures an image of a distant, isolated England out of the reach of her own sons. The rejection of the soldier's request for water becomes synonymous with his rejection by his country, as he uses his English identity to beg for it but is still denied: '"We cannot give you water / Were all England in your breath"' (9–10). No amount of Englishness or identification with his country can give the soldier succour. 'A worm fed on the heart of Corinth' uses the central metaphor of a worm to represent the inherent decay and corruption at the heart of all great civilisations, which eventually destroys them: 'A worm fed on the heart of Corinth, /

[16] An implication also made in Blunden's 'Pillbox' above, and discussed more comprehensively below, with regard to Sassoon and Owen in particular, as their vision of such an England is more fully realised.

Babylon and Rome: / Not Paris raped tall Helen, / But this incestuous worm' (1–4). This metaphor is so swiftly and economically established, with successive references or allusions to Corinth, Babylon, Rome and Troy, that only a single explicit reference to England is required to make the connection to centuries of historical folly and destruction: 'England! famous as Helen / Is thy betrothal sung / To him the shadowless, / More amorous than Solomon' (7–10). Despite the lack of physical descriptions, England is immediately configured and situated in history as a great but inherently corrupt civilisation doomed to the same fate as Babylon and Rome. Similarly, 'Through These Pale Cold Days' functions through an allegory of the ancient Jews yearning for their homeland, with 'dark faces burn[ing] / Out of three thousand years' (2–3). Given Rosenberg's immersion in his Jewish heritage and his melding of it with his English identity, as highlighted by Sassoon's recognition of 'a fruitful fusion between English and Hebrew culture' ("Foreword" to *Collected Poems*, vii) in his work, the poem seems to represent the yearning of English soldiers for home: 'While underneath their brows / Like waifs their spirits grope / For the pools of Hebron again – / For Lebanon's summer slope' (5–8). England, in the guise of Hebron and Lebanon this time, is, as in 'The Dying Soldier', configured as a beautiful but distant place that can never be reached. Rosenberg's largely unseen England is therefore an ambiguous one consistent with his mixed view of the war – an idyllic place nevertheless situated in the destructive cycle of history, and out of reach of its own people. On the whole, while this vision of England, being restricted to a few poems, does not quite dominate Rosenberg's poetry, its presence is still notable, providing an interesting contrast with the more prominent and visible England of the other poets.

3.2 An (Ironically) Ideal England

Not all the war poets were driven by nostalgia or a desire for rarefied experience and personal expression. The explicit protests of poets like Sassoon against the war are well known, to the point that First World War poetry in general may sometimes be automatically and mistakenly assumed to be anti-war, rather than about the broader experience of war that may or may not include anti-war attitudes[17]. This anti-war agenda is encapsulated by the act and content of Sassoon's public declaration in 1917, especially its final lines:

> On behalf of those who are suffering now I make this protest against the deception which is being practised on them; also I believe that I may help to destroy the callous complacence with which the majority of those at home regard the continuance of agonies which they do not share, and which they have not sufficient imagination to realise.
>
> 'A Soldier's Declaration' (Cited in Egremont 144)

This desire to eradicate civilian complacence by stimulating the public imagination via graphic depictions of war's realities is another key motivation of the war poets, and has an indirect influence on their depictions of England as a place. England is presented as an idealised, halcyon land of peace and tranquillity that is to all intents and purposes a different world, an isolated refuge from the horrors of war. As Patrick Campbell observes, 'one world is usually set in stark opposition to another: a landscape, and especially a dawn English landscape replete with birdsong... provides a positive antidote to the warscapes of the front line' (57).

[17] Martin Stephen mentions how 'Owen, Sassoon and Rosenberg created the myth of the Great War as Waste and Pity', and how the work of trench poets 'sum[med] up what society thought it had to feel about the Great War (XII). Simon Featherstone avers that '[w]ar poetry, as it is now generally presented and interpreted in the anthologies, is the poetry of 1914–18. Its purpose is seen to be telling the truth about war, and its prevailing attitudes as pacifist' (7).

This idealised conception of England, however, does not exist only as an anodyne for the war experience (as with Gurney), but also to stand in opposition to the war overseas and bring it into sharper relief. England is ironically turned into a kind of 'other', a familiar yet distant place to the English soldiers for whom the war is the only reality. Irony is thus an important factor in this vision of England, highlighting the perversity and destructiveness of the war by drawing attention to the vast differences between the two worlds. This is usually accomplished via emphasis on the rural beauty of England, which the soldiers should be able to enjoy and take for granted but instead are either barred from or granted access to only by being injured. Sassoon's short poem 'The One-Legged Man' demonstrates this relationship between irony and the English landscape, depicting a one-legged soldier surveying the Georgian-style landscape of his home country: 'Propped on a stick he viewed the August weald; / Squat orchard trees and oasts with painted cowls; / A homely, tangled hedge, a corn-stalked field, / And sound of barking dogs and farmyard fowls' (1–4). The appeal and value of the countryside are augmented by the soldier's deep appreciation for it, he having 'come home again to find it more / Desirable than ever it was before' (5–6). This builds up to the ironic reality that finally detonates the poem: 'Safe with his wound, a citizen of life. / He hobbled blithely through the garden gate, / And thought: "Thank God they had to amputate!"' (10–12). The crippled soldier is now not just a citizen of England, but in the poet's words 'a citizen of life' as well, England and life having become indistinguishable. The unmolested English landscape becomes a form of currency for the poet's ironic protest against a war that not only cripples its victims, but leaves them grateful for it. While the irony does not reside in the bucolic countryside itself, that countryside acts as a conduit for it, as the irony hinges on the soldier's wound having become a blessing that has enabled him to enjoy the pleasures and comforts of home. The poem, and its implicit protest

against the war, would hardly work if the landscape were significantly less than perfect.

The protest may also be made more vehemently and with different environments. Owen's 'The Dead-Beat'[18] focuses on an English soldier who apparently dies of shell-shock. While Sassoon's poem centres on the pastoral, Owen's depicts urban locations like Caxton Hall, as well as staples of popular culture like writer Hilaire Belloc, cartoonist Bruce Bairnsfather and the magazine 'Punch'. However, the relationship between Owen's use of irony to condemn the war and his conception of England is essentially the same as Sassoon's. Amid the carnage in a trench, the soldier resentfully visualises an entirely different world beyond his reach – 'the crowd at Caxton Hall' (7) and 'Hotels... improved materially; // Where ministers smile ministerially' (12–3), in addition to 'Punch still grinning at the Belcher bloke; / Bairnsfather, enlarging on his little joke, / While Belloc prophecies of last year, serially' (14–6). This accumulation of physical and cultural detail results in a depiction of a country that is peaceful, prosperous and complacent, the very antithesis of the trench experience. While such a vision should, the poem implies, be the soldier's reality, he is barred from it, an outcast of his own island. The irony is maximised through Owen's repeated juxtapositions of England and the trench, sometimes line by line: 'Or see or smell the bloody trench at all / Perhaps he saw the crowd at Caxton Hall' (6–7); 'He sees his wife, how cosily she chats; / Not his blue pal there, feeding fifty rats. / Hotels he sees, improved materially' (10–2). These close and persistent contrasts drive home the horrors of civilian complacency as well

[18] The version discussed is the earlier of two different versions, enclosed in a letter of Owen's dated 22 August 1917, in which he mentions he 'wrote something in Sassoon's style' (*Selected Letters* 270). In the later version the specific cultural references are removed, possibly because of feedback from Sassoon that 'the facetious bit was out of keeping with the first & last stanzas' (*Selected Letters* 271). However, the basic image of a prosperous and inaccessible homeland is still retained.

as the horrors of the war, effectively suggesting that they are two sides of the same coin, and Owen's vision of England's landscape is central to that. As before, Owen's landscape itself does not contain the irony that drives the poem, but rather enables it to work by setting up the ironic position of a soldier denied the munificent rewards and privileges of his own country, which his sacrifice has contributed to.

Nevertheless, such idealised depictions of England are not all driven by ironic protest. Some of the poems protest the war more mildly or implicitly, driven more by compassion and empathy than an active anti-war agenda. Sassoon's 'Dreamers' depicts soldiers yearning for the homely comforts of 'firelit homes, clean beds and wives' (8), and 'mocked by hopeless longing to regain / Bank-holidays, and picture-shows, and spats, / And going to the office in the train' (12–4). Although England is presented in much the same way as in the previous poems, and serves a similar purpose – emphasising the 'hopeless longing' and isolation of the men overseas – irony and anger are noticeably absent, replaced by a more intimate and empathetic first-person perspective that pushes the anti-war agenda to the background: 'I see them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats / And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain' (9–10). 'Stretcher Case', like 'The One-Legged Man', depicts a soldier invalided back to a familiar and largely bucolic English landscape, but lacks the pungency of the latter poem. The soldier sees 'hills and skies, / Heavily wooded, hot with August haze, / And, slipping backward, golden for his gaze, / Acres of harvest' (5–8). Yet the poem does not build up to any blunt, ironic statement, but ends on a similarly placid note, reaffirming the physical beauty and longevity of an unchanging England: 'There shone the blue serene, the prosperous land, / Trees, cows and hedges; skipping these, he scanned / Large, friendly names, that change not with the year, / Lung Tonic, Mustard, Liver Pills and Beer' (20–3). As a result, England 'is no longer a repository of hypocritical or myopic attitudes; it is redeemed... by its landscape, as the speaker gratefully renews his bond with the natural world' (Campbell 119). Of

course, this redemption does not mean that the war is occluded or minimised – as with Sassoon's other works 'the poem's dramatic impact derives from a sense of contrasts' (Ibid.), namely, as in 'The Dead-Beat', the close juxtaposition of the war and England: 'Feebly now he drags / Exhausted ego back from glooms and quags / And blasting tumult, terror, hurtling glare, / To calm and brightness, havens of sweet air' ('Stretcher Case', 8–11). Yet unlike in 'The One-Legged Man', there is no sense that the soldier is a vehicle for an anti-war statement; his simple relief at being home seems unscripted and genuine: 'But was he back in Blighty? Slow he turned, / Till in his heart thanksgiving leaped and burned' (18–9). The underlying anti-war agenda that fuels Sassoon's presentation of the unspoiled English landscape may still be present, but, partly due to the absence of irony, it does not take centre stage.

Even when irony and protest are present, the healing and redemptive power of the pastoral landscape can still take precedence. Owen's 'The Send-Off' has no shortage of the first two elements, yet the poem is ultimately an expression of healing rather than anger. The soldiers being sent to the front, like 'wrongs hushed-up' (11), are 'grimly gay' (3), their breats 'stuck all white with wreath and spray / As men's are, dead' (4–5). Owen's bitter irony is acute in 'Nor there if they yet mock what women meant / Who gave them flowers' (14–5), the natural world being indubitably and ironically associated with death. The flowers given by well-meaning but ignorant women are also a symbol of death due to their traditional use at funerals. Yet the poem ends on a more placid note of reconciliation and redemption, despite the Sassoon-esque contrast that is also present: 'Shall they return to beatings of great bells / In wild train-loads? / A few, a few, too few for drums and yells, / May creep back, silent, to still village wells / Up half-known roads' (16–20). Although the poem does not lose sight of the immense human cost of the war, its final image of the rural country does not have any clear ironic or satirical overtones. The survivors eschew the superficiality of 'drums and yells' to find peace in the tranquil obscurity of the

countryside and ‘still village wells’, associated with succour and healing. The English landscape functions here as an emblem of relief and respite, rather than an explicit channel for irony and protest.

On the whole, the soldier poets in this chapter were motivated by their living conditions to imagine a vivid England similar to that of their predecessors the Georgians. Unlike the Georgians, however, their vision of England is idealised but not as superficially celebratory, and the physical realism the Georgians espoused but executed inconsistently was refined and concentrated by the trauma of the war on their senses, particularly the visual. Some, especially those motivated by nostalgia, went to the extent of re-creating England overseas, not just thinking of England while fighting in France, but actively bringing England to France in their work, as Gurney did. In contrast, explicitly anti-war poets like Owen and Sassoon emphasised the disjuncture between England and France, creating a vividly idealised version of the former but situating it away from the world of the trenches and battlefields, in order to emphasise the isolation and deprivation of the men fighting for a prosperous and beautiful land that is effectively no longer theirs. The traditional notion of the Other, as explicated by Colley, is ironically turned on England in these poems, with England becoming the ‘other’ place that the poets in the trenches defined themselves against. Regardless of where each of the poets stands regarding the war, their visions of England as a place are similar even if their motivations and feelings may not be, a testament to the impact of the shared trench experience.

Chapter 4

People

The people the war poets were compelled by circumstance to interact with were as central to their vision of England as their physical environment. The war not only afforded them an intense first-hand experience of the natural landscape, but also of the other soldiers sharing that experience. Such an experience had a strong effect on their conception of England in terms of its people. Yet it was not merely their living and working so closely with fellow soldiers that affected that conception of England, but their experiences of witnessing the numerous injuries and deaths of those soldiers, and sometimes suffering injuries themselves. The psychological impact of witnessing such physical trauma is clear in one of Owen's letters (23 September 1914), in which he graphically describes how '[o]ne poor devil had his shin-bone crushed by a gun-carriage-wheel, and the doctor had to twist it about and push it like a piston to get out the pus' (*Selected Letters* 121). Injury and death, two of war's staples, had a clear and significant impact on their perception of England.

The precise nature of that impact, however, is less clear-cut. It might be expected that such close contact with diverse Englishmen from all classes and positions would have augmented a poet's sense of Englishness and possibly elided class and cultural differences. Yet that is not the only thing that happened. Rather, experiencing the deaths and injuries of so many men, and not just those on their own side, also caused a fundamental dilution of the war poets' sense of Englishness. Such stark physical realities occluded nationalistic concerns – the dead and dying men became humans foremost, rather than Englishmen or Germans. This sense of 'internationalism' and general identification with all soldiers perhaps resulted in the widespread sense of solidarity between many soldiers on both sides and the corresponding antipathy towards most civilians, as well as a strong emphasis on the

physical body in the war poetry. The gruesome and dehumanising nature of the injuries and deaths paradoxically made it difficult for the poets to view the soldiers as anything but human beings.

A similar but more complex phenomenon also occurs with regard to class. As discussed in greater detail in the penultimate chapter ('Conservatism'), the traditional English class system was mirrored by the structure of the military, and hence was carried over to the trenches fundamentally intact. Yet despite this the same conditions that caused a greater identification with and sympathy for the enemy soldiers also caused a corresponding dilution of traditional notions of class. The unrelenting threat of death, coupled with the practical necessities of men from different classes having to cooperate and function as an efficient unit, was instrumental in softening rigid social hierarchies. The effect of this on their sense of Englishness is somewhat paradoxical – on one hand this more egalitarian attitude towards their countrymen reduced their traditional sense of Englishness as far as internal social divisions were concerned, but on the other it also arguably enhanced their sense of *communal* Englishness, since they were Englishmen after all.

Therefore, while the war poets' sense of Englishness was certainly attenuated in some respects, it was by no means obliterated, and what remained of it was also changed significantly by the intimate and intense contact with so many fellow soldiers. Despite viewing the Germans as equally human and deserving of sympathy, the poets were more familiar with their own countrymen if only because of proximity, and thus retained a more complex sense of identification with them. In addition, as discussed later, many close encounters with Germans involved their corpses rather than the living men. As a result of all these factors, a new England, in the form of its soldiers, seems to have developed in France, in contrast to the old England back home – an England at once more diluted and more specific and

exclusive than before. The soldiers come to represent the real England, with everything and everyone else, particularly civilians, made to seem superficial or specious in comparison. This real England is manifested in human terms, with concentrated attempts at realistic depictions of the fighting men and their physical and psychological trauma, compared with the negative and one-dimensional portrayals of English civilians back home. This represents a significant diversion from the Georgian poets, whose overall vision of England is, despite their realist tenets and social awareness, more superficial and celebratory. For the war poets, the old, traditional England is a relic of the past, divorced from the new reality forged by the war.

4.1 Dilution of International Boundaries

Many war poets tended to reject nationalistic discourse in favour of a universal solidarity, resulting in the subsequent elision of cultural and national boundaries. A key reason for this is that, according to Max Saunders, '[i]t was in the nature of trench warfare that for the most part the only enemies encountered closely were dead ones', and thus '[o]ne of the most familiar tropes in war literature is the disconcerting turn when someone looks at the corpse of an enemy soldier... and begins to see them no longer as an enemy, but as a fellow human' (65). Robert Graves's anti-war poem 'A Dead Boche' demonstrates a similar movement:

> Where, propped against a shattered trunk,
> In a great mess of things unclean,
> Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk
> With clothes and hair a sodden green,

Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,

Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.

(7–12)

The dead soldier's nationality ('Boche') is only mentioned in passing, with the focus on his mutilated corpse – his status as 'the enemy' is never emphasised or engaged. Of course, 'Boche' was a familiar jingoistic term. However, given the overall tenor and focus of Graves's poem, it seems likely that the poet is using the term in an ironic sense, i.e. to make readers, and perhaps himself, question their own use of such an 'othering' term. Although the poet does not specifically identify with the dead soldier as a fellow human, the implication that the man's death has stripped him of the humanity he originally had is clear from the description. The soldier's body is decomposing yet still recognisable, with the presence of spectacles a poignant touch that perhaps hints at the higher intellect of the dead man, which has now been destroyed. Graves also presents him, to his presumably English readers, as 'a certain cure for lust of blood' (l.6), again demonstrating how insignificant nationality has become, since a more jingoistic Englishman might have celebrated the German's death, or at least used an English corpse to denounce war. To the poet, one corpse is as good as another for his anti-war message. The opposition soldiers are thus often viewed as fellow-humans and fellow-sufferers, with no boundaries separating them.

This focus on the physical remains of a soldier also reflects a wider trend among the war poets, namely that of a strong emphasis on the body and the related states of death and injury. This emphasis on the physical body, especially in the act of dying, ultimately results in a diluted view of England, as a soldier's nationality and other aspects, while not entirely ignored, are pushed to the background. Sassoon's 'Counter-Attack' provides a vivid description of the corpses in a trench:

The place was rotten with dead; green clumsy legs
High-booted, sprawled and grovelled along the saps
And trunks, face downward, in the sucking mud,
Wallowed like trodden sand-bags loosely filled;
And naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair,
Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime.
(7–12)

While the corpses are presumably English, this time there is no identification of them at all. The poet's eye travels fairly systematically down the entire length of the dead human body, from the legs to the head, in a reversal of how it might appraise a living man. Despite the abject dehumanisation of the dead men, who are compared to 'trodden sand-bags loosely filled', the final, ironic verb 'slept' provides a sharp reminder of their humanity and what it has been subjected to. Sleep as an ironic euphemism for death also features in other poems, like Sassoon's 'The Dug-Out' and Owen's 'Asleep', serving to illustrate the thin line between life and death and how quickly it can be crossed, and in turn emphasising the fragility of human existence.

The soldiers, therefore, are often defined more by their deaths or injuries than their actual identities, which in itself might turn them into dehumanised automatons, as Graves wryly observes in 'Recalling War': 'Machine guns rattle toy-like from a hill, / Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall' (42–3). However, this is precluded by techniques employed to bring out their humanity, most notably the attempts to empathetically re-create the physical experience of dying and being injured. This results in a reduction in the individuality of the men but a corresponding increase in their shared humanity. In Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est', the dying soldier, despite (or because of) the graphic description of his agonising death, never appears as an

individual, and becomes the subject of the poem solely because of his death, with the focus on ‘the white eyes writhing in his face, / His hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin’ (19–20), and ‘the blood / ... gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs, / Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud / Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues’ (21–4). Yet, at the same time, the man’s essential humanity is only amplified by his death, especially since Owen initially presents it in terms that the average non-combatant would find easier to understand and empathise with: ‘As under a green sea, I saw him drowning. // In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning’ (13–5). The use of a familiar metaphor like drowning bridges the potential gap in understanding between Owen and his readers, since death by poison gas is hardly a frequent occurrence in civilian life, and it is presumably easier to imagine the sensation of drowning, or at least relate to it. That the man is meant to represent all the soldiers who have similarly suffered and died, and who will in future, is confirmed by Owen’s final, direct address, which condemns blind nationalism in general: ‘My friend, you would not tell with such high zest / To children ardent for some desperate glory, / The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori’ (25–8). The soldier’s death renders him one-dimensional and representative, yet starkly human.

The re-creation of death may be taken further than vivid external description. In Sassoon’s ‘The Death-Bed’, the poet attempts to place the reader in a dying soldier’s body, imagining the physical sensations and psychological state of the dying man: ‘He stirred, shifting his body, then the pain / Leapt like a prowling beast, and gripped and tore / His groping dreams with grinding claws and fangs’ (28–30). As before, there is no indication of whether the soldier is English or German, or of his individual personality, only that ‘[h]e’s young; he hated War; how should he die / When cruel old campaigners win safe through?’ (37–8). Sassoon’s soldier, like Owen’s, is clearly a vehicle for his anti-war message, yet neither poet treats his

subject callously, making a distinct effort to depict the man as a realistic, if anonymous, human being. In 'Dead Man's Dump', Rosenberg also makes a comprehensive attempt to imagine the sensation of injury and the moment of death, particularly in the concluding portion, which narrows the poem's initially wide scope by focusing on a single soldier: 'Here is one not long dead; / His dark hearing caught our far wheels, / And the choked soul stretched weak hands / To reach the living word the far wheels said' (69–72). The dying man's final, confused sensations are captured by the synaesthesia of 'dark hearing' and the enigmatic, mixed images of a 'choked soul stretch[ing] weak hands' and 'the living word'. The generally awkward and choppy syntax of the lines (e.g. 'To reach the living word the far wheels said') also enhances the sense of chaos and disruption. Hence, as with Sassoon and Owen, 'the man's death is particular and representative', and '[t]he tenderness... without destroying the representative quality, holds our attention upon this man and his death' (Silkin 1972, 288). The soldiers may lose their identities, including their Englishness, but not their essential humanity.

However, the focus on the physical body at the expense of nationality is not the only source of this dilution of Englishness. As 'A Dead Boche' demonstrates, Germans do feature specifically in many war poems, but the treatment of them reduces the distance between them and their English counterparts, creating a corresponding attenuation of national identity. The English and Germans become unique in name only, the division created by this specific identification offset by the similarities between them. By specifically invoking the Germans, the war poets paradoxically undermine their own English identity. Sassoon's acerbic sonnet 'Glory of Women' is crafted around this paradox – the octave attacks the delusions of civilian women in general, while the sestet is precisely divided in terms of both length and rhyme (*abc*/*abc*), targeting English and German women in turn:

You can't believe that British troops 'retire'
When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,
Trampling the terrible corpses – blind with blood.
O German mother dreaming by the fire,
While you are knitting socks to send your son
His face is trodden deeper in the mud.
(9–14)

The son of the German mother, it is implied, has his face trodden into the mud as a corpse by the retreating British soldiers, both sides virtually indistinguishable in the sanguinary chaos. The English and German soldiers, far from being separated by their respective nationalities and opposing positions, are united in their suffering, with the poet's anger directed equally at both sets of women. The only division present is between soldiers and civilians.

Active reconciliation between the two sides is another prominent theme, further undercutting national differences. Sassoon's unambiguously-titled 'Reconciliation', a more conciliatory version of 'Glory of Women' and hence one of the few poems that treats civilians with as much respect as soldiers, advises English mothers to 'Remember, through your heart's rekindling pride, / The German soldiers who were loyal and brave' (3–4). While acknowledging the ugly realities of war and the extreme feelings stirred up by them, the poet ultimately casts aside all differences: 'Men fought like brutes; and hideous things were done; / And you have nourished hatred, harsh and blind. / But in that Golgotha perhaps you'll find / The mothers of the men who killed your son' (5–8). Both sides ultimately end up in the same 'Golgotha' of suffering and sacrifice. Significantly, there are no more references to Germans (or English) in this second stanza, only universal nouns like

'men', 'mothers' and 'son'. Reconciliation between the soldiers themselves takes place in 'Enemies', in which a friend of the poet's, in the afterlife, faces 'the hulking Germans that I [the poet] shot / When for his death my brooding rage was hot' (5–6). As in other poems, Sassoon refrains from taking the moral high ground with regard to the enemy, candidly implicating himself in the violence and hence implying that he is no different from them. Nevertheless, the poem is not entirely successful in overcoming differences and prejudices – the Germans are stereotyped as 'hulking', and given less definition and sympathy than the poet's friend, being presented as 'patient, stupid, sullen ghosts of men' (9). Sassoon's familiarity with a specific English friend, particularly a close one, appears to preclude a more even-handed depiction. Yet his final position is, as before, one of unity, compassion and mutual understanding: 'At last he turned and smiled. One took his hand / Because his face could make them understand' (11–12). The literal connection between the English and German soldiers renders their nationalities irrelevant and results in a mutual understanding.

Finally, active reconciliation can also take more comprehensive and complex forms. Owen's 'Strange Meeting', a poem similar to Sassoon's in content and theme[19], espouses reconciliation but also presents it in a less straightforward and idealistic way. In this dream poem, two opposing soldiers meet in the afterlife, with the German soldier addressing the English one and articulating thoughts and feelings they presumably both share. Bonded by their common humanity and sense of waste, their essential differences begin to fade: '"None," said that other, "save the undone years, / The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours, / Was my life also; I went hunting wild / After the wildest beauty in the world"' (15–8). The soldiers' lives

[19] Martin Stephen also observes the similarities in characterisation and setting between 'Enemies' and 'Strange Meeting', speculating that the former might have influenced the composition of the latter (200).

and aspirations are shown to dovetail in no small way. The poem's most prominent line, 'I am the enemy you killed, my friend' (40), encapsulates this sense of dissolved nationality, particularly since an earlier draft read 'I was a German conscript, and your friend'[20], showing that the poet intentionally abandoned national particularity by removing the specific reference to Germany, despite the merits of the earlier version of the line. Despite this, however, Owen's view of reconciliation is perhaps less simplistic than Sassoon's, as his central image of two soldiers coming together is not without ambiguity and contradiction – the meeting is a 'strange' one, the German soldier is likewise greeted with the oxymoronic term 'Strange friend', and the overall atmosphere is, as the title suggests, one of pain, alienation and surrealism rather than warmth and comradeship: 'And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall, / By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell. / With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained, / Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground' (9–12). This is no doubt due in part to Owen's desire to articulate the horror and waste of war, but such a treatment also suggests the difficulties inherent in the reconciliation of both sides. While 'I am the enemy you killed, my friend' may demonstrate the dilution of national differences, the 'enemy-friend' juxtaposition is also jarring and inherently contradictory, even if it makes sense intellectually[21]. The poem does ultimately assert its main theme of reconciliation by concluding with 'Let us sleep now...' (44), but it feels slightly forced given the perhaps inevitable unresolved tension and

[20] Jon Silkin provides a detailed analysis of the two lines, and their respective merits, in his Introduction to *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry, Second Edition* (1981, 62–73).

[21] Silkin prefers the original version of the line, arguing, among other things, that in the final version 'the stresses are on "killed" and "friend"... thereby getting the line system to enact a less complex irony, a more literary paradox, than the first version' (1981, 72). In addition, 'more "aloneness" is given to the little phrase "my friend" which, in its paradoxicality, imparts a tone of solemnity... rather than the irony *and* pain of "and your friend" of the first version' (1981, 72–3).

ambiguity that come with killing one's friend: 'I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned / Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed. / I parried; but my hands were loath and cold' (41–3). The German soldier appears to take the moral high ground here, as he implies that he only parried the narrator's blows half-heartedly due to an inherent aversion to killing (which the narrator obviously did not share), his hands being 'loath and cold'. This would seem to go against the poem's overt message of equality and brotherhood between the soldiers on all sides, as one side implies that the other is more bloodthirsty. Tension and paradox linger even amid the overall dissolution of national boundaries.

4.2 Dilution of Class

The greater sense of internationalism was complemented by a corresponding diminution of class-based hierarchies within the English army. Just as there was a dilution of Englishness across international boundaries, there was a dilution of class consciousness across internal social boundaries. This was not sufficient to eradicate the fundamental class distinctions, and the underlying social structures, carried over from England to the trenches, remained essentially intact. Nevertheless, these social structures could not escape the war totally unchanged, due to the same sense of universal solidarity that elided the differences between English and Germans, enhanced even more by the greater proximity – locational, linguistic and cultural – of the English soldiers to each other. The social distinctions so central to regular Edwardian life were invariably diminished by the trauma of the battlefield and the ever-present prospect of injury and death.

The change in perspective is most extreme when death is viewed as the ultimate leveller and negator. In Charles Hamilton Sorley's 'When you see millions of

the mouthless dead', death is simply and starkly presented, shorn of all consolations and Romantic appeal: 'Say not soft things as other men have said' (3). This is also a possible allusion to Brooke and his patriotic sonnets glorifying sacrifice. Of course there is no shortage of war poems about death, but few of them, even the most graphic, present it in such explicit and unambiguous terms. Sassoon's poems, for instance, mention death directly but are seldom explicit about its permanence, leaving it implied, as in the last line of 'Trench Duty': 'Blank stars. I'm wide-awake; and some chap's dead' (14). Sorley, on the other hand, leaves nothing to speculation: 'Say only this, "They are dead." (9); 'Then, scanning all the o'ercrowded mass, should you / Perceive one face that you loved heretofore, / It is a spook. None wears the face you knew. / Great death has made all his for evermore' (11–4). Likewise, the sonnet beginning 'Such, such is Death: no triumph: no defeat:' asserts the neutrality and egalitarianism of death, declaring that '[v]ictor and vanquished are a-one in death: / Coward and brave: friend, foe. Ghosts do not say / "Come, what was your record when you drew breath?"' (7–9) Death consumes and equalises all the superficial trappings of life, leaving, as Sorley's concluding lines seem to suggest, a form of fundamental individuality (perhaps the spirit or soul) that those trappings have previously suppressed: 'And your bright Promise, withered long and sped, / Is touched, stirs, rises, opens and grows sweet / And blossoms and is you, when you are dead' (12–4). Death might not be the absolute end, but it is certainly a permanent negation of all the previous inequalities and divisions that have gone before, a 'merciful putting away of what has been' (l.3).

Although, appropriately enough, Sorley does not single out class elisions specifically in his depiction of death as an undiscriminating negator, the thinning of class boundaries is apparent in other poems. Sassoon and Owen, despite being officers, do not write very much about the officer life or about fellow officers, but instead concentrate on the soldiers under their command, expressing a strong sense

of loyalty to and solidarity with them. Although this stems in part from a paternalism that ultimately precludes a complete dissolution of class boundaries, it at least demonstrates an underlying desire to reduce the distance between the classes. Sassoon's 'Sick Leave' and 'Banishment', which concern, respectively, his period of time away from the front and his public condemnation of the war on behalf of all soldiers, lay bare his state of mind. In 'Sick Leave', the poet in the safety of his bed dreams of his men still fighting at the front, and experiences severe guilt, anguish and loneliness: 'In bitter safety I awake, unfriended; / And while the dawn begins with slashing rain / I think of the Battalion in the mud. / "When are you going out to them again? / Are they not still your brothers through our blood?"' (9–13) In the absence of the battalion, the poet feels completely friendless, demonstrating the extent of his attachment to them; the civilian friendships he presumably has recede into oblivion. Even more significantly, he views his men as 'brothers' through 'blood' ('blood' in a wartime context taking on added significance), demonstrating a disregard for class values, since blood is what effectively determined one's social station in England.

'Banishment', a companion poem of sorts, expresses Sassoon's internal anguish at his failed attempt to end the war for his men via his 'Soldier's Declaration' and his subsequent 'banishment' from them to Craiglockhart Hospital, officially for treatment for a nervous breakdown[22]. Of course, the innate paternalism and protectiveness of the upper-class officer lingers in some of its lines: 'Their wrongs were mine, and ever in my sight / They went arrayed in honour. But they died / Not one by one: and mutinous I cried' (4–6). However, the sense that he believes, correctly or not, that he is merely on equal footing with them is equally clear: 'Love drove me to rebel. / Love drives me back to grope with them through hell; / And in their tortured eyes I stand forgiven' (12–4). That he believes he needs their

[22] As recounted by Max Egremont in his biography of Sassoon (156–8).

forgiveness, despite already exceeding his obligations to them by risking life and career with his failed protest, suggests a consciousness that, while still paternal, is able to traverse the boundaries of class and authority to a significant extent. Likewise, despite Owen's clear sense of duty as a superior officer (e.g. in 'The Sentry'), the egalitarian comradeship he believes the war has created between him and his men is apparent:

> I have made fellowships –
> Untold of happy lovers in old song.
> For love is not the binding of fair lips
> With the soft silk of eyes that look and long,
>
> By Joy, whose ribbon slips, –
> But wound with war's hard wire whose stakes are strong;
> Bound with the bandage of the arm that drips;
> Knit in the webbing of the rifle-thong.
>
> ('Apologia Pro Poemate Meo', 17–24)

The traditional conceptions of love are overturned, and the traditional barriers that might once have separated men of different classes are transcended by their shared conditions, symbolised by the 'binding' metaphors of wire, bandage and rifle-thong, and by the greater awareness of their common vulnerability and mortality, symbolised by 'the arm that drips'. The use of blood, as with Sassoon, is a stark reminder of the underlying shared humanity of all soldiers.

Equally reflective of class elisions are the satirical poems that attack the upper classes and depict them as foolish, self-indulgent and deluded, and hence

complement the poems that express solidarity with the common soldier[23]. Sassoon's 'Memorial Tablet (Great War)' is written from the perspective of a commoner who 'volunteered' for war under the Derby Scheme after being 'nagged and bullied' (1) to fight by his country Squire. The upper-class Squire's obliviousness of his subject's suffering and death, and his responsibility for it, is bitterly exposed:

> At sermon-time, while Squire is in his pew,
> He gives my gilded name a thoughtful stare;
> For, though low down upon the list, I'm there;
> '*In proud and glorious memory*'... that's my due.
> Two bleeding years I fought in France, for Squire:
> I suffered anguish that he's never guessed.
> Once I came home on leave: and then went west...
> What greater glory could a man desire?
>
> (7–14)

Given that Sassoon himself was from a similar class as his fictitious Squire, living the life of a country gentleman for a time[24], such a poem is especially notable. The poet might be expected to have been biased towards his own class. That he was instead able to attack a man similar to him in many respects suggests an ability to look beyond class loyalties and see the fundamental injustice in the situation, regardless of who perpetrated it. The Squire is a bully who abuses his position of power by coercing his subject to enlist, presumably to satisfy his own ego or bolster his social

[23] This is essentially a more specific version of the soldier-civilian conflict discussed later.

[24] Egremont paints a picture of 'a sporting country gentleman, guest in the local grand houses where he danced', who spent the time playing cricket and golf, and hunting (42).

prestige. He subsequently remains ignorant of the suffering endured on his account, not even bothering to secure his subject a prominent place on the memorial tablet. Sassoon's obvious contempt for the Squire, coupled with his equally apparent sympathy for his anonymous narrator, illustrates his lack of class discrimination as he gives a voice to the oppressed lower-class soldier. The perverse and unbalanced nature of the class system is also subtly reflected in the form of the poem – it is effectively an inverted or reversed sonnet, with the sestet coming before the octave.

The upper classes in other settings are also not spared. 'The Fathers' is less of a specific attack on the upper classes and more of a general one on civilian complacence (it can be viewed as a companion to 'Glory of Women'), but its setting, characters and diction are unquestionably upper class. Two fathers sit '[s]nug at a club' (1) and have a conversation that reflects their arrogance and ignorance of the true state of affairs: 'One of them said: "My eldest lad / Writes cheery letters from Bagdad. / But Arthur's getting all the fun / At Arras with his nine-inch gun"' (3–6). The fathers see war as nothing but 'fun', an enjoyable holiday. The poet's contempt for them is even greater than for the Squire – they are 'gross, goggle-eyed, and full of chat' (2), and the concluding image is of a pair of geriatric, feckless men: 'I watched them toddle through the door – / These impotent old friends of mine' (13–4). 'Impotent' is particularly ironic and scathing, since it humiliatingly excludes them from the masculine activities they were celebrating. Sassoon's bitterly ironic identification with them ('old friends of mine') is a simultaneous acknowledgement and repudiation of his own upper-class position, demonstrating, again, his shrinking class allegiances. 'Base Details' shifts the poet's focus to the upper classes in the military, but is otherwise similar, presenting a scathing image of old, physically decrepit senior officers enjoying the creature comforts of the base while they 'speed glum heroes up the line to death' (3) and pay them banal and perfunctory tributes: 'You'd see me with my puffy petulant face, / Guzzling and gulping in the best hotel, / Reading the Roll of

Honour. “Poor young chap”’ (4–6). Sassoon even reuses the word ‘toddle’ from ‘The Fathers’ in his final description of the officers: ‘And when the war is done and youth stone dead, / I’d toddle safely home and die – in bed’ (9–10). Once again, there is the subtle acknowledgement and implicit rejection of the poet’s own position, as the entire poem is predicated on the knowledge that he could be exactly like them if he were older: ‘If I were fierce, and bald, and short of breath’ (l.1). Contempt of the upper classes might not in itself be indicative of class elisions, but coupled with Sassoon’s sympathy for all soldiers regardless of class, and his refusal to endorse the attitudes and behaviour of his own class, it presents a compelling case.

4.3 The English Remnant

Despite the reduction of the war poets’ specific sense of Englishness, their English identity could never be erased completely. As suggested previously, reconciliation between enemies is not a straightforward affair, and while the poets may have set their sights on an all-encompassing humanity, they were not necessarily able to go all the way. In addition, they were simply more familiar with the soldiers on their own side than those on the other. Yet what remained of their sense of Englishness was also changed by the conditions they were working under. Their isolation from civilian society, coupled with resentment of the perceived ignorance of the general population and the callousness and incompetence of those in power, resulted in their viewing England primarily in terms of its fighting men and their sacrifice. John Lehmann identifies ‘the growing alienation between the men fighting in France and Flanders and the civilians, both young and old, at home in Britain’, which became so intense that ‘many... welcomed the return to what was to them real existence: danger, death, mutilation and the ruined landscapes of the fighting areas’ (9). As a result, ‘[t]wo separate worlds were developing: the world of make-believe at home,

and the enclosed, entirely male, comfortless world of bombardment and slaughter, ruled by martial discipline and illumined only by camaraderie and heroic selflessness' (Lehmann 10). For the war poets, the real England is represented by their fellow soldiers, and is often thrown into sharper relief by their contrasting treatment of civilians, who are almost inevitably cast in a negative light.

This new sense of Englishness is explicit in poems that explicitly establish the division between the new England and the old. In Owen's satirical poem 'Smile, Smile, Smile', the disabled soldiers are presented, by virtue of their war experience and suffering, as possessing knowledge and insight that transcend words, 'smil[ing] at one another curiously / Like secret men who know their secret safe' (19–20). Their wordless, ironic smiles stand in stark contrast to the volubility of the newspaper, which hypocritically (from the poet's perspective) uses the benefit of the soldiers as an excuse for promoting the continuance of the war for material gain: '"Peace would do wrong to our undying dead, – / The sons we offered might regret they died / If we got nothing lasting in their stead. / We must be solidly indemnified"' (9–12). To add insult to literal injury, the soldiers' smiles are condescendingly misunderstood by well-meaning but ignorant civilians: 'And people in whose voice real feeling rings / Say: How they smile! They're happy now, poor things' (25–6). Although the poet recognises the civilians' sincerity, it is made incongruous by their misreading of the situation. However, the poem really turns on the use of the word 'nation', which is what initially prompts the soldiers' smiles: '"The greatest glory will be theirs who fought, / Who kept this nation in integrity." / Nation? – The half-limbed readers did not chafe / But smiled at one another curiously' (16–9). While the word is used in a straightforward and non-ironic manner by the newspaper, it is obviously viewed very differently by Owen and the wounded soldiers, who see the real nation as consisting only of men like themselves – a nation that is anything but united and kept in integrity. This sense of the real England having no physical or moral connection with

the old is made explicit with the revelation of the soldiers' exclusive knowledge: '(This is the thing they know and never speak, / That England one by one had fled to France, / Not many elsewhere now, save under France.)' (21–3). Hence this new England is seemingly the result of, in the words of Simon Featherstone, 'a willing, desperate act to get away from the land of the *Daily Mail* in which only the company of crippled veterans share the knowledge of the destruction of the "real" England' (33). England is no longer represented by nationalistic newspapers or oblivious civilians, but by the men, living and dead, who have physically and/or psychologically 'fled' to different shores.

Of course, many poems do not express this new Englishness in such explicit terms, yet the underlying soldier-civilian comparison is usually sufficient to expose it. Owen's 'Greater Love' is clearly structured around such a comparison, juxtaposing the traditionally attractive physical features of a woman with the physical injuries and deaths of the soldiers, and establishing that the former can never live up to the selfless sacrifice implied by the latter: 'Red lips are not so red / As the stained stones kissed by the English dead' (1–2). The 'English dead' are effectively apotheosised, while the woman, a representative of the old England that values comparatively shallow attributes like red lips, fair skin, slender figures and soft voices, is flatly rejected:

> Heart, you were never hot
> Nor large, nor full like hearts made great with shot;
> And though your hand be pale,
> Paler are all which trail
> Your cross through flame and hail:
> Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not.
>
> (19–24)

The soldiers have ascended to a higher plane, leaving a weak and superficial country behind. In Sassoon's 'Fight to a Finish', the suggestion of a new Englishness rising from the soldier-civilian conflict is also implied rather than stated outright. With characteristic satire, the poet presents his fantasy of 'Yellow-Pressmen', presumably those responsible for war-mongering articles like the one in 'Smile, Smile, Smile', who 'cheer the soldiers who'd refrained from dying' (3), only to have the soldiers turn around and bayonet them, having finally 'found a cushy job' (9). The poet himself takes his 'trusty bombers' (11) and goes to 'clear those Junkers out of Parliament' (12). By presenting the civilian press in an almost animalistic manner ('I heard the Yellow-Pressmen grunt and squeal' [10]) and emphasising the German extraction of parliament members ('Junkers'), Sassoon effectively dismisses the existing England as consisting of sub-human people and, perhaps more importantly for the nationalists he opposes, Germans. This effectively undercuts, as Owen does, any proclamations of a 'nation in integrity'. A new sense of Englishness, if only incipient, appears to have developed with the demise of the old.

Yet the soldier-civilian conflict does not always feature in the war poets' new conceptions of Englishness. As discussed in the previous chapter, Gurney's poetry often expresses a strong nostalgia for England in general and Gloucestershire in particular, and so does not break with the original England as Sassoon's and Owen's poems do. Nevertheless, his feelings for home are often stirred by the men from Gloucestershire that he is fighting with in France, and the sense of dislocation the men suffer from their native land is often emphasised, as in 'Strange Hells'[25], which

[25] Unlike the poems by Gurney discussed previously, this poem is not from his first two volumes, *Severn & Somme* (1917) and *War's Embers* (1919), having been written after the war.

appears to depict a form of post-traumatic stress disorder by delving into 'the strange hells within the minds war made' (1). This immediately sets the soldiers apart from everyone else. Although, with characteristic fondness, Gurney describes how his Gloucestershire regiment conquers '[o]ne hell' (2) – presumably the immediate fear caused by the shelling – by singing, he goes on to suggest that the lingering trauma of the war will never be erased from their minds, even after they are back home: 'Where are they now, on state doles, or showing shop-patterns / Or walking town to town sore in borrowed tatterns / Or begged. Some civic routine one never learns. / The heart burns – but has to keep out of face how heart burns' (11–4). The picture is a fairly typical one (at least by modern standards) of isolated, maladjusted ex-soldiers who are unable to fully integrate into society, divorced from the 'civic routine' of the country they once knew. While it may be a stretch to suggest that Gurney conceives of a whole new England, the soldiers are still in a world of their own, bound only by a shared experience and the camaraderie of doing things like singing together.

This new world becomes clearer when the soldiers' courage and sacrifice are celebrated even as their isolation is emphasised. In 'To England – a Note', Gurney pays a simple tribute to his fellow soldiers' dedication: 'I watched the boys of England as they went / Through mud and water to do appointed things. / See one a stake, and one a wire-netting brings' (1–3). The soldiers are explicitly and non-ironically identified as 'of England', which links them and their deeds directly with Englishness. There is a difference between this connection and Owen's 'England one by one had fled to France', though – while Owen appears to view England *entirely* in terms of the soldiers, Gurney remains open to the possibility of England consisting of other elements too, since the men are 'of' England but do not necessarily compose all of it. This is obviously in keeping with Gurney's nostalgia for his home and his unwillingness to reject it. Yet the poem also makes it evident that the soldiers are in an entirely different setting: 'Though the strength be spent / They "carry on" under the

shadowing wings / Of Death the ever-present. And hark, one sings / Although no joy from the grey skies be lent' (5–8). Their sacrifice and its value are also emphasised in no uncertain terms: 'Are these the heroes – these? have kept from you / The power of primal savagery so long? / Shall break the devil's legions? These they are / Who do in silence what they might boast to do' (9–12). Like the 'secret men who know their 'secret safe' (l.20) in 'Smile, Smile, Smile', the soldiers are content to 'do in silence what they might boast to do', effectively isolating them further from England and the rest of the world.

In other poems, Gurney also makes his allegiance to England clear while emphasising the chasm between the old life and the new. 'Servitude' begins with a reiteration of his commitment to his country: 'If it were not for England, who would bear / This heavy servitude one moment more?' (1–2) Yet the poet also illustrates the stark reality of his new life: 'To keep a brothel, sweep and wash the floor / Of filthiest hovels were noble to compare / With this brass-cleaning life' (3–5). Yet, once again, it is 'the love of comrades [that] sweetens all, / Whose laughing spirit will not be outdone' (9–10), the friendship and laughter of the common soldier, as opposed to the 'sergeant-major's bluster and noise' (14) taking pride of place in the new reality. Finally, 'Butchers and Tombs'[26], a realistic appraisal of the anonymity and insignificance of that common soldier, illustrates in more physical terms Gurney's vision of an authentic but dislocated England: 'It had seemed well to cover them with Cotswold stone – / And shortly praising their courage and quick skill / Leave them buried, hidden till the slow, inevitable / Change came should make them service of France alone.' (2–5). The dead soldiers from Gloucestershire should be covered with 'Cotswold stone' in honour of their heritage, yet the poet also recognises that their physical separation from their native land means that they will be 'in service of

[26] Another Gurney poem written after the war.

France alone', no longer Englishmen in the conventional sense, but instead representative of an England that has 'fled to France'. Although Gurney does not repudiate the original England or condemn its civilians as some of the other poets do, the division between the old England and the one created by the war is equally acute, and equally founded on principles of brotherhood, solidarity and sacrifice.

The new English remnant in France is therefore very much configured in terms of the English soldiers fighting there, and is the result of a greater sense of 'internationalism' and diminution of class hierarchies. This sense of equality and shared humanity paradoxically narrowed the war poets' sense of Englishness as far as people from England were concerned, since that equality was still an exclusive one that did not extend far beyond their wartime environment. As the next chapter argues, that equality was also not absolute as their underlying conservatism results in a retention of fundamental social structures and traditions.

Chapter 5

Conservatism

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, the war poets' vision of England is on the surface a refreshed and vivid one, moulded by the unique experiences and pressures of fighting in the trenches. Yet what is hopefully also implied is the conservatism underlying that vision. Ultimately, despite the war poets' new internationalism and their conception of a distinct and vivid England set apart from the old, they were fundamentally more conservative than innovative, and that conservatism ultimately pulled them back into a more traditional, and perhaps limited, sense of Englishness. The newness and distinctiveness of their vision lies primarily in its clarity and focus on certain aspects, rather than in a radical reinvention of the past. As already highlighted, the Georgian and Romantic influence, and the pastoral myth that many poems espouse, link their work closely with the traditional past, and the traditional social hierarchies and perspectives of contemporary society underpin their more egalitarian views. Finally, also reflecting this underlying conservatism are the largely traditional language and forms they chose to employ. Despite minor innovations like Owen's half-rhyme and Rosenberg's semi-modernist style, the majority of the war poems have undeniably strong links to former literary traditions. These two key areas of class and language ultimately restrict the originality of the poetry and pull it back in the direction of its traditional roots.

5.1 Class

Although the war brought men from varied backgrounds together and attenuated social and cultural differences to a point, the class structures that governed English society were still retained, if more loosely than before. George Parfitt mentions that

‘[a] breakdown of some 200 poets of the war produces a rather sharper profile of a “typical” English war poet: a young Army subaltern, educated at a fee-paying school and Oxford or Cambridge, whose social standing is professional/genteel’ (14). On the whole, only ’12 per cent of the sample went to state schools’ and ‘only about one in twenty of these poets could be called plebeian’ (Ibid.) The recruiting policies of the military were partially responsible for this as, according to Alexander Watson, the ‘pre-War British corps was... “characterised by social and financial exclusiveness”’, and ‘lower commissioned ranks came predominantly from the upper middle class’ (116–7). In other words, the structure of the military loosely reflected the prevailing social structures of the day, with men from the upper classes more likely to be commanding those from the lower classes. In addition, in a replication of how the upper classes lived back home, some officers had servants – lower-ranking soldiers – to assist them with their chores and duties, as suggested in Owen’s ‘A Terre’, which is narrated by a higher-ranking officer: ‘My servant’s lamed, but listen how he shouts!’ (25) This socially-elite structure was reinforced by the ‘beneficial effects of this composition on officer-man relations... [as] upper-class officers were preferred by the British army precisely because their background and education provided them with useful leadership skills’ (Watson 117). Of course, the high turnover rate of officers eventually prompted a more flexible recruitment policy, as ’39 per cent of officers came from the lower middle and working classes by the end of the war’ (Watson 121). Yet even so, the army ‘attempted to maintain a veneer of class distinction between ranks and ensure that new, lower-class officers were fully imbued with the traditional values of paternalism and leadership’ (Watson 122). Thus while social mobility may have been augmented by necessity, the officers in the army, regardless of origin, were still moulded into one consistent class, with the expectations and responsibilities of that class. In particular, the paternalism that they

were expected to show to their men in order to enhance loyalty and morale highlights the fundamental class division between officers and men.

As most of the war poets were officers, this class division is reflected, if only inadvertently, in their collective vision of England. Sassoon's short poem 'The General', for instance, subtly demonstrates the division between the rank-and-file soldiers and the high command, the two extremes of the military. The highly satirical poem depicts a general bidding good morning to two soldiers before the battle of Arras, only for them to be killed as a result of his attack plan. Yet, as Martin Coyle observes, the poem is about more than just satire of the incompetence of the military leadership; the paternalism that forms such a significant part of the prevailing class structure is apparent in the contrast between the general's '"Good-morning; good morning!"' (l.1) and his avuncular smiles at the soldiers, and the far more informal remark of one of them that '"He's a cheery old card"' (5). While 'his paternalism encourages this sort of affection and familiarity', ostensibly bringing the two classes closer together, it also encourages the same loyalty and obedience that sees the soldiers go to their deaths with unjudging acceptance, and hence the deaths of the two soldiers are 'linked to their acceptance of the upper classes' (Coyle 125). Ominously, the general's smiles seem to bestow death on his men: 'Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead' (3). In addition, the poem appears to draw a link between their voicing of their familiarity ('"cheery old card"') with the general and their ultimate demise, implying that '[t]hey are sent to their death... for daring to voice such familiarity, a familiarity encouraged by the general's "Good-morning, good morning"' (Coyle 126). Excessive familiarity may not exactly breed contempt, but it crosses a line – the line here being that between life and death, with the upper-class general going on his own 'cheery' way while the soldiers are condemned, indirectly by him. While satire may be Sassoon's main aim, and his sympathy lies with the soldiers as always, the poem itself hints, perhaps inadvertently, at the class structures and

complex power dynamics underlying even a brief and seemingly banal meeting between the two groups.

The class division is also apparent in the war poets' more intimate depictions of the soldiers as they perceived them. Their paternal position takes the form of well-meaning but patronising attitudes towards the men, and a tendency, as noted earlier, to deprive them of their individuality and typecast their personalities, behaviour, backgrounds and speech. On the whole they are presented as simple, earnest and somewhat childlike characters lacking real definition, as in Sassoon's lengthy poem 'A Working Party'. The poem follows a single soldier through the trenches, and despite its length does not reveal very much about the soldier as an individual, tending to focusing on his environment instead: 'Sometimes he tripped and lurched against the walls / With hands that pawed the sodden bags of chalk. / He couldn't see the man who walked in front; / Only he heard the drum and rattle of feet' (3–6). The atmosphere of the trench tends to dominate the poem at the expense of the man. However, as in 'The Death-Bed', the soldier is not used as a mere conduit for Sassoon's anti-war message either, as the poet also emphasises the details of his condition, relating how '[t]hree hours ago he stumbled up the trench; / Now he will never walk that road again: / He must be carried back, a jolting lump / Beyond all need of tenderness and care' (26–9). The tenderness and care with which Sassoon treats his subject is quite clear, though, with secondary details like 'three hours ago' (as perhaps opposed to 'some hours' or 'some time') lending more verisimilitude to the specific character and his interaction with his particular surroundings. Yet this treatment of an individual soldier's identity is ultimately inadequate, with his background reduced to a mere snippet, and a condescending one at that: 'He was a young man with a meagre wife / And two small children in a Midland town' (30–1). The family portrait of a 'meagre' wife and 'small' children in a presumably obscure Midland town betrays the snobbish view of an upper-class individual, whose elitism is

made apparent by the use of such demeaning adjectives. When the poem focuses on the soldier himself, he immediately fades into obscurity: ‘And they considered him a decent chap / Who did his work and hadn’t much to say / And always laughed at other people’s jokes / Because he hadn’t any of his own’ (33–6). The soldier lacks personality, being primarily defined by his work and his perfunctory reactions to others. His ignominious death, while probably intended to be poignant, also seems to resemble the death of a small animal during a hunt (an upper-class activity): ‘And as he dropped his head the instant split / His startled life with lead’ (48–9). Sassoon’s paternalism veers, perhaps inevitably given the class divide, towards the patronising.

Equally patronising and lacking in depth are the descriptions of soldiers who are portrayed as simple-minded rural men who suffer passively and show a complete lack of awareness of the reasons for it. Such soldiers are depicted in some of Sassoon’s shorter poems, like ‘The Redeemer’, ‘In the Pink’ and ‘Suicide in the Trenches’. ‘The Redeemer’ compares a soldier to Christ, making a connection between the former’s sacrifice in the trenches and the latter’s dying for humanity. Yet that connection becomes extremely tenuous with the soldier’s depiction as a passive and ignorant sacrifice with a very limited perspective – hardly an omniscient Christ-like figure who gives his life for humanity with full awareness and knowledge:

> No thorny crown, only a woollen cap
> He wore – an English soldier, white and strong,
> Who loved his time like any simple chap,
> Good days of work and sport and homely song;
> Now he has learned that nights are very long,
> And dawn a watching of the windowed sky.
> But to the end, unjudging, he’ll endure

Horror and pain, not uncontent to die
That Lancaster on Lune may stand secure.
(19–27)

This stanza epitomises the stereotypical view of the common soldier that was the result of the poets' paternal attitudes. Sassoon characterises the English soldier as a 'simple chap' who enjoys homely, uncomplicated pleasures and apparently even has difficulty judging the lengths of nights, painting an overall picture of a pure, robust but simple-minded rural man willing to accept his lot and die stoic and 'unjudging' (unlike, presumably, the poets who profess to speak out against the war on his behalf). The implication of the description is clear – the soldier is a dedicated but limited simpleton, whose fortitude in carrying out simple tasks is to be admired in the same way a father might be proud of his slightly backward but earnest son. Despite Sassoon's feeling for his soldiers, his characterisation of them is indicative of the class gulf that still existed.

Likewise, 'In the Pink' focuses on another homely soldier from a rural background – a farm – who would on Sundays 'go cheerful as a lark / In his best suit, to wander arm in arm / With brown-eyed Gwen, and whisper in her ear / The simple, silly things she liked to hear' (9–12). Of course, he also remains completely ignorant of the reasons for his plight: 'To-night he's in the pink; but soon he'll die. / And still the war goes on – *he* don't know why' (17–8). In that last line, the poet even adopts free indirect discourse in his description of the soldier's thoughts (or lack thereof), adopting his ungrammatical vernacular and emphasising the soldier's lack of education, knowledge and awareness. This stereotype emerges yet again in 'Suicide in the Trenches', which depicts the suicide of 'a simple soldier boy / Who grinned at life in empty joy, / Slept soundly through the lonesome dark, / And whistled early with the lark' (1–4). Again, the adjective 'simple' is used, and the poem's subject is

depicted as being comfortable with nature but lacking any higher faculties. The boy may not exactly be a simpleton, but is unable to react to anything other than his immediate environment. Like the soldier in 'A Working Party', he eventually dies like an unsuspecting, oppressed creature destroyed by the cruel world: 'In winter trenches, cowed and glum / With crumps and lice and lack of rum, / He put a bullet through his brain' (5–7). In his attempts to expose the plight of the soldiers, Sassoon also lays bare the class differences that have been carried over into the trenches. Furthermore, these very attempts to speak on behalf of what are perceived to be a simple people with no voice might themselves be indicative of the overarching paternal and class-based hierarchy.

A comparison of these vignettes of the common soldier with the treatment of upper-class officers makes the gulf between the classes even more obvious. Sassoon's 'To Any Dead Officer', as the title suggests, is addressed to a fellow officer on the poet's level, and the differences in diction and approach between it and the previous poems are apparent: 'Good-bye, old lad! Remember me to God, / And tell him that our Politicians swear / They won't give in till Prussian Rule's been trod / Under the Heel of England' (33–6); 'Cheero! / I wish they'd killed you in a decent show' (39–40). Although Sassoon's characteristic satire aimed at the politicians and warmongers remains, its pungency has been diluted by his easy, conversational second-person address to a member of his own class he is clearly comfortable speaking to. There is the possibility that Sassoon's very use of such an address is also satirical (i.e. he is deliberately affecting upper-class diction to satirise the upper classes), but there is no real indication that he is anything but sincere: 'You hated tours of trenches; you were proud / Of nothing more than having good years to spend; / Longed to get home and join the careless crowd / Of chaps who work in peace with Time for friend' (9–12). The whole tone of the poem is intimate, confiding and mildly jocular, giving the impression that the poet and his addressee are

members of some elite club, like the one in 'The Fathers'. This impression is strengthened by the fact that, despite the poem's intimacy, the poet is, at least ostensibly, not actually addressing any personal friend, but 'Any Dead Officer'[27] – the poem could thus be said to be addressed to his class as a whole. Unlike 'Base Details' and 'The Fathers', in which Sassoon excoriates the upper class while uneasily acknowledging his own membership in it, this poem contains no real tension. Although, as those poems suggest, the poet clearly disapproves of the callous and hypocritical attitudes of other upper-class men, it is equally clear that he has not been able to shed his upper-class identity entirely, retaining, at the very least, some superficial trappings of it.

As the various vernaculars in 'To Any Dead Officer', 'In the Pink' and 'The General' demonstrate, the use of speech also serves to demarcate the class boundaries in the trenches. The war poets' patronising treatment of their men extends to depictions of their speech, resulting in exaggerated portraits of them. Rudyard Kipling, one of the first prominent poets to establish the use of vernacular in verse, created a distinct working-class atmosphere in the poems of *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892 & 1896), the narrators of which are mostly rank-and-file soldiers: 'E'll be squattin' on the coals, / Givin' drink to pore damned souls, / An' I'll get a swig in Hell from Gunga Din!' ('Gunga Din', 77–9). The use of such vernacular by some of the war poets creates a similar atmosphere, their attempts at authenticity and perhaps a greater identification with their men paradoxically highlighting the divide between them. Owen's 'The Letter' and 'The Chances' are written entirely in an exaggeratedly Kipling-esque vernacular, and so come across more as parodies rather than actual replications of the soldiers' speech. Thus 'pity can degenerate into

[27] Sassoon notes, however, that despite the poem's title 'it was addressed to one whom I had known during both my periods of service in France' (Cited in Stephen 206).

something close to condescension... in those poems where Owen pretends to speak through the mouths of ordinary line soldiers and ends up with the sort of ventriloquism that... was common enough in Edwardian poetry, and where a writing down can easily become a writing off' (Lucas 1986, 75–6). Almost every line of 'The Chances' is in informal, non-standard English, giving the impression that the speaker is some sort of caricature: 'One of us got the knock-out, blown to chops. / T'other was 'urt, like, losin' both 'is props. / An' one, to use the word of 'ypocrites, / 'Ad the misfortoon to be took be Fritz' (9–12). As Parfitt points out, 'when Owen tries to speak with the tongue of the ranker, he can do no better than stage-Cockney', and 'the result is embarrassing in the awkwardness of the attempt at someone else's language'[28] (64). Owen's attempt at speech mimicry veers into the condescending by being too unrealistic and one-dimensional.

In addition, as in Sassoon's poems, the soldiers are shown to be completely passive and accepting individuals by Owen, taking no initiative and seemingly content to be sent to their deaths, which they are helpless to prevent. The narrator of 'The Chances', before enumerating the unfortunate fates of five fellow soldiers, declares hopelessly and with grim levity: '"Over the top to-morrer; boys, we're for it. / First wave we are, first ruddy wave; that's tore it!"' (3–4). In 'The Letter', the soldier writing the letter to his wife typically finds that '[t]here don't seem much to say just now' (9); the poem ends with him getting shot and silenced, being even unable to finish writing and having to request a friend to do it on his behalf. Sassoon's 'Twelve Months After' relates the false optimism of some of his men in their vernacular: '"The war'll be over soon." "What 'opes?" "No bloody fear!"' (l.2); '"Old soldiers never die; they simply fide a-why!"' (l.9) Of course, such sentiments are swiftly and ironically

[28] Although Owen may not have been very familiar with the Cockney accent, that very unfamiliarity may have been one of the reasons he chose it for the voice of the ranker, since he was already attempting to write in the voice of a class unfamiliar to him.

punctured when his platoon is massacred: ‘That’s what they used to say before the push began; / That’s where they are today, knocked over to a man’ (11–2). ‘Knocked over to a man’ also gives the impression that the men were passive objects, like toy soldiers, from the beginning, and recalls Graves’s ironic ‘Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall’ (‘Recalling War’, 43) – inanimate objects with no free will can hardly be described as ‘brave’ legitimately. The excessive use of vernacular, coupled with the child-like helplessness of the soldiers, ensures that the boundary separating the lower classes from the upper is still clearly drawn, despite the camaraderie and feelings of solidarity.

Speech and accent also delineate class in the trenches in more subtle ways. Gurney’s ‘The Silent One’, despite not containing any Kipling-esque vernacular, offers a more complex and probing exposition of the power dynamics that revolve around speech. The ‘Silent One’ of the title is a lower-class soldier, identified as such by his ‘[i]nfinite lovely chatter of Bucks accent’ (3), who has been killed by blindly following the orders of an officer, again identified only by his ‘finicking accent’ (9). Thus, as Coyle notes, ‘the ruling class masters the troops into repeated sacrifice on the basis of how they speak’ (127). Gurney – one of the few war poets who was a private soldier and hence on the same level as the ‘Silent One’ – escapes his fate by adopting ‘those social manners which maintain differences between the classes’ (Ibid.), placing himself, at least momentarily, in the same class as that of the officer: ‘Darkness, shot at: I smiled, as politely replied – / “I’m afraid not, Sir”’ (l.12). Thus this speech act ‘pinpoint[s] a symbolic moment when language is turned on language to resist the tyranny of patrician discourse’ (Coyle 127), and in the process exposes the class boundaries that have been transferred to the England of the trenches. Of course, against this must be set the strong and genuine identification of the war poets – regardless of their rank – with their fellow soldiers, and the sense of equality and brotherhood that fostered, as expressed by Sassoon: ‘And while the dawn

begins with slashing rain / I think of the Battalion in the mud. / "When are you going out to them again? / Are they not still your brothers through our blood?"' ('Sick Leave', 12–3). Yet it is equally clear that, far from being superseded by this, the hierarchies of their former society remained fundamentally unchanged, if less obtrusive and rigid than before.

5.2 Language and Form

Equally reflective of this essential conservatism are the linguistic and stylistic choices made by the majority of the war poets, which, as the discussion of the Georgians suggests, demonstrate the clear and direct influence of previous poetic traditions, despite the divergences from and developments of those traditions. According to Nils Clausson, the origins of the trench poems can be traced all the way back to Romantic lyrics, as the Romantic poems gave the war poets a template with which to configure their new reality[29]. The poets, he argues, 'did not "retreat" into an earlier tradition but actively transformed it' (125), and as a result 'maintained continuity with the major nineteenth-century poets while at the same time incorporating their uniquely modern experience of trench warfare' (126). This continuity with antecedent

[29] The Romantic influence was not just restricted to form and (at least with certain poems, like 'Strange Meeting') themes, however. In his Introduction to *Out of Battle*, Jon Silkin suggests 'that some of the forces which developed in the nineteenth century emerged in the First World War and influenced the poets' (1972, 1), and goes on to explicate those forces and their effects. Most notably, he highlights 'the contradictory pressures of [Samuel Taylor Coleridge's] position' (1972, 8), illustrating how the poet indicts war yet abruptly appears to espouse English nationalism – a reflection of 'the conflicting attitudes of a man distracted by the rival claims of patriotism (and its concomitant social pressures) and inter-national radicalism' (Ibid.). He also draws attention to Coleridge's possible 'impotent and intermittent awareness that neither country [here, France and England] is innocent, and that the conflict is not susceptible to clear-cut judgements' (Ibid.). Similar pressures are apparent in some of the war poems, like the one by Gurney that begins this thesis.

forms, he elaborates via genre theory, was less of a conscious choice than a natural development, as 'an antecedent genre constitutes and guarantees the experience represented in the poem as being genuinely poetic... what makes it poetic is the antecedent genre: no generic conventions, no poem' (117). Yet while genre conventions may certainly have played a part in determining the war poets' modes of poetic expression, they may not constitute the sole reason. As with the retention of class structures, the traditional language and forms that they employed might also have sprung from a deep-rooted conservatism and a more conventional Englishness than might at first be apparent, an Englishness that instinctively aligns itself with the past due to a visceral belief in its superiority. Coupled with their implicit espousal of the class system, their use of traditional language and forms provides a compelling case for a fundamentally conservative sense of Englishness, especially when viewed alongside the Modernist poetry that was beginning to be written during the same period.

A poem like Blunden's 'Preparations for Victory' in many ways exemplifies the linguistic and formal features that are present in at least some degree in much First World War poetry:

> My soul, dread not the pestilence that hags
> The valley; flinch not you, my body young,
> At these great shouting smokes and snarling jags
> Of fiery iron; as yet may not be flung
> The dice that claims you. Manly move among
> These ruins, and what you do, do well;
> Look, here are gardens, there mossed boughs are hung
> With apples whose bright cheeks none might excel,
> And there's a house as yet unshattered by a shell.

(1–9)

The deliberately archaic nature of the poem is immediately evident, with elaborate, elevated and somewhat awkward (at least to modern ears) poetic language dominating throughout. Blunden makes extensive, perhaps excessive, use of poetic inversions, with three in the first two lines alone: 'dread not'; 'flinch not you, my body young'. Conventional if vivid imagery, similes and metaphors abound, like the plague infecting the valley, the fiery iron of bullets and shells, and the flinging of the dice of life and death. The pastoral elements that are a regular feature of Romantic and Georgian poetry are also employed, albeit in an ironic way – the gardens, mossed boughs, and bright-cheeked apples, perhaps an allusion to the forbidden fruit in the Bible. Also prominent is the poem's Spenserian stanza form, a form seldom used in modern poetry, and one with clear connections to Romantic poetry (particularly by Lord Byron, Percy Shelley and John Keats) and, of course, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, partly intended as a commemoration of Britain and Queen Elizabeth I. Blunden's revival of it may thus suggest a desire to recall one of Britain's 'golden ages', the height of the English Renaissance.

Paul Fussell explains Blunden's archaisms[30] and rural imagery as the poet's 'engaging the war by selecting from the armory of the past weapons against it which seem to have the greatest chance of withstanding time' (337), and additionally suggests that 'Blunden's style is his critique. It suggests what the modern world would look like to a sensibility that was genuinely civilized' (Ibid.). While this implicit

[30] Of course, most of the war poets, even Blunden, do generally write in a common diction, and so any 'archaisms' or traditional leanings are at least partially offset, or updated, by the new context and material. However, 'Preparations for Victory' (as well as many other Blunden poems) is surely archaic in some sense, not just because of the Spenserian stanzas but also the language, diction and imagery, which clearly hark back to an earlier period despite the updated context.

indictment of the war may indeed be a significant factor in Blunden's traditional linguistic choices, the implication of Fussell's words also seems to be that in Blunden's view, the elements 'which seem to have the greatest chance of withstanding time', along with a 'genuinely civilized' sensibility, are to be found only, or at least most prominently, in the language and images of a traditional, rural English past – a 'pre-industrial England, the only repository of criteria for measuring fully the otherwise unspeakable grossness of the war' (Fussell 336). While Blunden's sense of England as a specific place may not be as acute as that of Thomas and Gurney, his poetry has clear roots in the English pastoral tradition, even if most of it is supposed to be set in France: 'I have seen a green country, useful to the race, / Knocked silly with guns and mines, its villages vanished, / Even the last rat and last kestrel banished' ('Report on Experience', 5–7). Regardless of the implicit intentions of Blunden's poetry regarding his stand on the war, it seems clear that its imagery, language and forms spring from an unshakeable conservatism that closely associates civilization and longevity with specific English linguistic and cultural traditions.

Although the distinctively English Spenserian form is limited to the one poem by Blunden, the forms of many other prominent war poems are hardly less traditional, with iambic pentameter, rhyming couplets, quatrains, blank verse and sonnets all frequently employed, with few, if any, distinctive variations. In particular, the sonnet, according to Edna Longley, 'is often a touchstone or synecdoche for English poetry – hence *Songs and Sonnets for England*. Thomas and Sassoon took Shakespeare's *Sonnets* to war' (62). Sassoon's dominant technique of inserting graphic or traumatic content into traditional forms to achieve shock effect naturally means that he does not move beyond such conservative forms. This is most clearly demonstrated in the blank verse poem 'Counter-Attack' and the sonnet 'Glory of Women' – in the latter, a form often used in the past to express love for a woman instead is turned into a

vehicle of bitter accusation of the entire gender. Yet the exclusive use of these forms cannot be attributed solely to his desire to shock his audience, as (as expanded on below) his use of such forms remained consistent throughout a long post-war writing career. Gurney's use of traditional forms is straightforwardly conservative, with the uncreatively-titled 'Sonnets 1917', a sequence of five sonnets mostly paying tribute to England (albeit not without a certain ambiguity, as established in the introduction), particularly notable: 'Give us a Home. / There we may wait while the long ages roll / Content, unfrightened by vast Time to come' ('Home-Sickness', 12–4). The majority of Owen's work is written in quatrains and couplets, and 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' is a clear blend of the two traditional sonnet forms, combining the octave-sestet division, and 'turn', of the Italian sonnet with the basic *abab* quatrains and concluding couplet of the Shakespearean sonnet: 'Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds, / And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds' (13–4).

Such unambitious formal innovations are characteristic of Owen's poetry as a whole. 'Strange Meeting', the most well-known example of his experiments with half-rhyme (perhaps his most significant innovation) is in all other respects a formally conservative poem written in iambic pentameter couplets and, like Blunden's poems, in rather archaic language: 'Now men will go content with what we spoiled, / Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled. / They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress. / None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress' (25–8). Even 'Insensibility', perhaps his most formally irregular poem, with its varied metre, rhymes and mixture of long and short lines, appears to owe something, both structurally and content-wise, to William Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality': 'The front line withers, / But they are troops who fade, not flowers / For poets' tearful fooling: / Men, gaps for filling:' ('Insensibility', 6–9). Just as Wordsworth laments the destruction of childhood wonder by age and the accumulation of worldly experience, Owen mourns the destruction of empathy and compassion by the war: 'Happy are men who yet

before they are killed / Can let their veins run cold. / Whom no compassion fleers' (1–3). Owen's focus on 'the lad whose mind was never trained' (34) mirrors Wordsworth's 'little Child, yet glorious in the might / Of untamed pleasures' ('Ode', 124–5), with both poems also ending on a similar note, Owen's 'eternal reciprocity of tears' (59) possibly inspired by Wordsworth's 'Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears' ('Ode', 206), with Owen's use of tears possibly even more conventional than Wordsworth's, since Wordsworth seems to be implying that tears are in fact a superficial expression of shallow feeling compared with the thoughts that 'lie too deep' for them, rather than, more typically, indications of sincere feeling and emotion, which is how Owen appears to use them. The link between Owen's poem and preceding Romantic styles and values is apparent.

Other poems also exhibit the conventional imagery, deliberately archaic diction, and links with older poetic traditions that Blunden's poetry epitomises. In 'S.I.W.', Owen compares a soldier's deteriorating mental state to '[c]ourage leak[ing], as sand / From the best sand-bags after years of rain' (15–6), and later uses the equally unremarkable metaphor of an 'infrangibly wired and blind trench wall' (31) to describe his hopeless situation. Of course, such examples are drawn from the poet's immediate environment, and so might not in themselves be indicative of an underlying conservatism. Yet many of Owen's images and comparisons that have no direct links with the war are equally customary, like his personification of 'the kind old sun' (8) with a healing touch in 'Futility', and his description of a gun as a 'long black arm' (1) in 'Sonnet: On Seeing a Piece of our Artillery brought into Action', a poem with even more exaggeratedly archaic language than usual: 'Sway steep against them, and for years rehearse / Huge imprecations like a blasting charm!' (3–4) Although Sassoon's diction is considerably more modern and direct, his images are no less conventional, as illustrated in 'Picture-Show': 'And still they come and go: and this is all I know – / That from the gloom I watch an endless picture show, / Where

wild or listless faces flicker on their way (1–3). Such descriptions are in themselves a verbal picture show of sorts, with nothing implied or left to the imagination.

This conservatism is thrown into even sharper relief when the war poems are placed alongside a major Modernist poem of the same period, T.S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', the volume containing which was published in 1917 and dedicated to a close friend of the poet's who was killed in the war[31]. This dedication may suggest that, as with the war poets although obviously to a lesser degree, the war was foremost in Eliot's mind during composition, and yet his work turned out quite differently from theirs. On the whole, according to David Perkins, 'Eliot's poetry overturned poetic conventions of the Romantic tradition, and his criticism attacked them' (9), and 'Prufrock' illustrates the gulf between works that consciously attempted to break with the past and the stylistic traditionalism of war poems like Blunden's. The central and most specific literary reference in 'Preparations for Victory' is a fairly simplistic and instantly recognisable one, drawn from the work of Shakespeare, generally regarded as the most famous and quintessentially English author[32]: 'The body, poor unpitied Caliban, / Parches and sweats and grunts to win the name of Man' (17–8). Despite the complexity and prominence of a figure like Caliban, Blunden does not fully exploit the potential of such a figure, instead using him as a straightforward image of man's dehumanisation. This dehumanisation of the physical body of the soldier by war is perhaps one of the most widespread images in the war poems, with Owen's 'Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, / Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge' ('Dulce Et Decorum Est', 1–2) and Sassoon's 'And trunks, face downward, in the sucking mud, / Wallowed like trodden

[31] Jean Verdenal, 1889–1915.

[32] According to Walter Raleigh, Shakespeare 'speaks for the English race. His works are not eccentricities of a solitary genius; they are the creed of England' (Cited in Holderness 210).

sand-bags loosely filled' ('Counter-Attack', 9–10) other notable examples of conventional similes and images.

Of course, the political reasons, as established previously, for the use of such images should also be taken into account. As poets like Owen, Sassoon and Blunden (to a lesser extent) wrote with the specific purpose of exposing war's realities to a civilian audience, their language and images probably had to be accessible by necessity, to convey the message directly and unambiguously – the fragmentation and obscurity of the Modernist style might not have served that purpose very well. Thus 'Sassoon's war verse rarely ventures far beyond the complexities of the pun... and generally ignores the capacity of metaphor and symbol to yoke heterogeneous images together by an effort of the imagination. Complex imagery, especially when couched in such figurative tropes, was an obstacle to comprehension' (Campbell 57). It is perhaps no coincidence that the poet most politically neutral and open to the war's effects on his artistic vision – Rosenberg – was stylistically the most 'Modernist' of the war poets. Yet even so the extent of their linguistic conservatism is too great to be accounted for by this alone. Sassoon's post-war poetry, as well as poems written during the war but not about the war, is essentially in the same stylistically traditional Georgian-pastoral vein: 'Alive – and forty-five – I jogged my way / Across a dull green day, / Listening to larks and plovers, well content / With the pre-Roman pack-road where I went. // Pastoral and pleasant was the end of May' ('Thoughts in 1932', 1–5). Pastoral symbols aside, the inclusion of the 'pre-Roman pack-road' is another obvious nod to England's past. Likewise, Owen's non-war poetry reveals a well-established Romantic sensibility: 'Sweet is your antique body, not yet young. / Beauty withheld from youth that looks for youth. / Fair only for your father. Dear among / Masters in art' ('Sonnet: To a Child', 1–4). There is little indication of any attempt to diverge from linguistic and formal traditions.

Unlike Blunden's conservative use of the Caliban figure, 'Prufrock's' deployment of images and allusions is far more varied, with mentions of or indirect references to Jules Laforgue, Michaelangelo, Shakespeare, Andrew Marvell and John Donne, among others. Despite a relatively linear narrative structure, the poem develops the sense of obscurity and fragmentation with irregular, seemingly random stanza forms, line lengths and rhymes, and Prufrock's internal monologue moves in a seemingly arbitrary fashion:

> And would it have been worth it, after all,
> Would it have been worth while,
> After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
> After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts
> that trail along the floor –
> After this, and so much more? –
> It is impossible to say just what I mean!
> (99–104)

Ironically, one of the most clear and unambiguous lines spoken by Eliot's titular character is an expression of the impossibility of words to communicate his meaning, a layered meta-challenging of language that is the polar opposite of the balanced, systematic and logical narrative structure of Blunden's poem. In 'Preparations for Victory', the poet addresses his soul in the first stanza, the soul replies in the second, and the poet summarises the situation for them both in the third, with the prevailing mood a consistent one of resigned sadness and despair, expressed with conventional imagery, old-fashioned syntax and perfect iambic pentameter (hexameter in the final line): 'Look, we lose; / The sky is gone, the lightless, drenching haze / Of rainstorm chills the bone; earth, air are foes, / The black fiend

leaps brick-red as life's last picture goes' (24–7). A slight incongruity, perhaps intended, exists with the placement of 'the black fiend', presumably the devil from hell, in a rainstorm, but other than that the final image fits perfectly into the poem as a solidification of the 'ghostly enemy / [that] Sickens the light' (14–5) of the second stanza and a neat parallel with the possibly Biblical pre-lapsarian gardens and bright-cheeked apples of the first. While Blunden's poem works by expressing alienation and despair through traditional, unified language, form and images, setting up a clear-cut antithetical relationship between war and nature, 'Prufrock' expresses alienation through the language, form and images themselves, with the only real unifying theme being disunity. The poem's opening similes of 'the evening spread out against the sky / Like a patient etherised upon a table' (2–3), and 'Streets that follow like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent / To lead you to an overwhelming question...' (8–10) are a far cry from the more intuitive ones of the war poets, requiring greater leaps of logic and perhaps reflecting the disordered state of the narrator's mind, creating unexpected links between disparate images. Blunden's comparisons, like those of his fellow war poets, are far more predictable, springing from the literary tradition he is comfortably ensconced in: 'Days or eternities like swelling waves / Surge on...' ('Preparations for Victory', 19–20). His poem may implicitly challenge and condemn the war and its destruction of man and nature by expressing the plight of the soldier, but it does so through a unified linguistic and cultural conservatism that emerges from an equally conservative sense of the English pastoral tradition.

Yet not all major war poetry is unequivocally conservative. As suggested previously, Rosenberg's work diverges significantly from that of his contemporaries, due perhaps in part to his relatively neutral, or at least ambiguous, attitude towards the war: 'O! ancient crimson curse! / Corrode, consume. / Give back this universe / Its pristine bloom' ('On Receiving News of the War', 17–20). While sharing some

similarity with Rupert Brooke's excessively romanticised view of the war, which cleanses humanity 'as swimmers into cleanness leaping' ('Peace', 4), Rosenberg's image does not gloss over the destructive nature of war as Brooke's sonnets do – the war is a 'curse' that ruins and devours. Yet, as Brooke does, Rosenberg also acknowledges its regenerative power, demonstrating, unlike Sassoon and Owen, a relatively objective consciousness with a wider perspective, as also illustrated by his own words: 'I will not leave a corner of my consciousness covered up, but saturate myself with the strange and extraordinary new conditions of this life, and it will all refine itself into poetry later on' (*Collected Works* 373). Rosenberg's forms, language and images are thus conspicuously different from those of any other war poet, as, according to John H. Johnston, '[h]is style is often rhetorical and diffuse; his development is loose and erratic; and his imagination, though brilliant with respect to details, frequently lacks coherence in form and conception' (246). Thus he is 'more intent on capturing his inspiration through spontaneous imagery rather than on the process of shaping that inspiration in a harmony of words, rhythms, rhymes and stanzas' (Ibid.). While his verse, despite its 'spontaneous imagery', might not strictly be considered Modernist, its irregular forms, fragmented images, frequently obscure (to the general reader, at least) language and allusions (usually to Hebrew myth and history) situate it closer to that movement than the unequivocally traditional styles of poets like Sassoon and Gurney.

'Dead Man's Dump', perhaps Rosenberg's most famous poem, illustrates many of these 'proto-Modernist' qualities. Like 'Prufrock', it has a fairly clear overarching linear narrative (the limbers dump bodies, and one dying soldier's final moments are described) that is punctuated by various internal digressions and abrupt shifts in focus, though Rosenberg's shifts are seemingly less random and more systematic than Eliot's. Thus the poem begins with a physical description of the bodies, moves to a musing on the relationship between the earth and their spirits or

life force, jumps to the living and wounded soldiers in mortal peril, reverts to the earth again, then finally settles on the last moments of a particular soldier. While not illogical, the poem's swift movements are certainly erratic, exacerbated by the inconsistent tenses and shifts in narrative perspective – a far cry from the relatively polished grammar of Sassoon and Owen. The poem begins in the past tense ('The wheels lurched over sprawled dead / But pained them not' [7–8]), with a third-person narration, before abruptly switching to the present perfect ('Earth has waited for them' [14]), and then to a second-person address: 'Earth! have they gone into you!' (21) The poem then briefly returns to the third-person past tense, only to switch again, this time to the simple present tense with a narration approaching the first person: 'What of us who, flung on the shrieking pyre, / Walk, our usual thoughts untouched' (32–3). It continues in this vein to the end, demonstrating a linguistic irregularity almost unique to Rosenberg. Formally, it is equally hard to pin down, as several lines do appear to have a fairly regular meter (e.g. 'To reach the living word the far wheels said' [72]) but the stanzas and line lengths are anything but consistent. Thus it might not qualify as free verse, but is certainly not written in any regular form either. While a few of Rosenberg's poems, like 'On Receiving News of the War', are written in traditional metered quatrains, his language, syntax and images are almost always decidedly non-conventional and 'in the moment': 'Snow is a strange white word' ('On Receiving News of the War', 1); 'But song only dropped, / Like a blind man's dreams on the sand / By dangerous tides' ('Returning, We Hear the Larks', 12–4). Unlike the work of the others, Rosenberg's poetry is not rooted in a fundamental conservative Englishness, but rather, as observed previously, in the aesthetic and emotional experience of the war itself.

Yet even Rosenberg's work, for all its uniqueness, is not entirely free from the influence of tradition. As Clausson argues, 'Returning, We Hear the Larks' and 'Break of Day in the Trenches' have strong structural continuities with the Romantic-

Victorian nature lyric, with certain lines echoing Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' (Clausson 121). He observes that both poems follow a structure similar to famous Romantic poems like Wordsworth's 'I wandered lonely as a cloud', Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' and Shelley's 'To a Skylark', with 'description of the setting, a shift to the primary object of the speaker's attention, followed by the reflections prompted by the speaker's chance encounter with the larks and the "queer sardonic rat"' (Clausson 123). Of course, Rosenberg's grim settings, not to mention the rat and poppy, are a world away from Shelley's skylark and Wordsworth's host of daffodils, as Rosenberg subverts these Romantic images and the Romantic connection with nature. Yet despite his wholly un-Romantic subject matter, the structural influences of the Romantic lyric remain. If Clausson's conclusion that 'the *form* of the Romantic nature lyric has been preserved, confirming that poems come not out of immediate experience but out of experience mediated through a pre-existing poetic form' (124) is slightly heavy-handed when applied to Rosenberg's work (which after all depends very much on immediate experience), it is still fundamentally accurate. Fussell also notes that 'Break of Day' works 'through indirection and the quiet, subtle exploitation of conventions of English pastoral poetry, especially pastoral elegy. It is partly a great poem because it is a great traditional poem' (315). In addition, 'the poem resonates as does because its details point to the traditions of pastoral and of general elegy' (Fussell 318), like the 'sleeping green' (l.12) crossed by the rat.

The relative conventionality of some of Rosenberg's individual images and comparisons should also not be overlooked. 'August 1914', which perhaps not coincidentally is one of the few poems with traditional form and metre, not to mention archaic language (also present in other poems like 'Dead Man's Dump'), contains typically intense and compelling imagery that is, however, still fairly typical at its core:

What in our lives is burnt
In the fire of this?
The heart's dear granary?
The much we shall miss?

Three lives hath one life –
Iron, honey, gold.
The gold, the honey gone –
Left is the hard and cold.

Iron are our lives
Molten right through our youth.
A burnt space through ripe fields
A fair mouth's broken tooth.

At the most basic level the poem relies on the intertwined images of fire burning youth away and the hardening of life and feelings – hardly a groundbreaking or original vision. Even 'Break of Day' lapses momentarily into conventionality with 'Sprawled in the bowels of the earth, / The torn fields of France' (17–8) and 'shrieking iron and flame / Hurled through still heavens?' (20–1) The ruined landscapes and guns firing their ordnance are invested with Rosenberg's typical, in the words of Sassoon, '*model[ling]* [of] words with fierce energy and aspiration' ("Foreword" to *Collected Poems*, vii), but the setting is still a commonplace and identifiable, and hence conventional, one. Rosenberg may be a unique outlier among the prominent soldier poets, but even his work, with its archaisms and classical allusions (invested though they are with his unique 'energy and aspiration'), cannot fully transcend the shaping influence of conservatism that limits the scope of their vision of England.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis has tried to demonstrate, through close analysis of primary material, some fundamental changes in the collective poetic vision of the most prominent soldier poets, which were brought about by the unique and traumatic conditions of the war. The traditional and conservative England of the pre-war poetic consciousness, as represented by the Georgians, was transformed by the first-hand experience of fighting in the biggest and most destructive war at that point in time. Yet this new vision of England is perhaps not very original in the strictest sense; its distinctiveness and novelty lie predominantly in its concentration on certain aspects already extant. England as a place, for instance, was conceived of in unusually heightened detail, partly due to the war-enhanced sensitivities that enabled the war poets to capture their immediate surroundings with graphic intensity, and partly because of their feelings of nostalgia for home and desire to end the war. In the trenches and battlefields themselves, the war poets tended to view England primarily in terms of the other soldiers, resulting in a vision of a new England overseas. Traditional divisions of nationality and class were attenuated, with the only boundary, physical and otherwise, that between the soldiers – the real England, in the minds of the war poets – and the civilians back home, who represented the old and sequestered England that could not measure up to the new. Ultimately, however, the war poets were fundamentally conservative as their vision, for all its distinctive elements, remained rooted in tradition, a tradition that aligned them with the Georgians and Romantics and that is most apparent in their treatments of class and language.

However, although this thesis has identified a trend and its key aspects, it has not explored the broad reasons behind the war poets' shared vision at great length,

besides the more specific ones of nostalgia and opposition to the war in ‘Place’. One of the most significant general reasons is an understandable desire to ameliorate the trauma of the trench conditions. Although some major war poets are famous for their unflinchingly realistic depictions of the nature of the war, mixed in with that realism is the impulse to soften or transform that reality. This impulse to ameliorate may be observed in their conceptions of place and people, as well as in their underlying conservatism. Where England as a place is concerned, the ameliorating impulse is most obvious in poems, particularly by Gurney, Blunden and Thomas, that hark back to an unspoiled pastoral country that serves as an anodyne to the horrors of war, as already discussed. In such poems, nostalgia is closely linked to the ameliorating impulse, as it facilitates the process of amelioration. Gurney’s ‘Ypres-Minsterworth’ is characteristic of such a phenomenon. The poet imagines the wind blowing through the countryside of his native Gloucestershire, before his thoughts turn to a friend incarcerated ‘in some German prison’ (13). Yet the poet does not allow his thoughts to linger on that grim reality, but instead returns to his daydream, comforting himself with thoughts of what he and his friend might be doing back home: ‘A boy lies with whom / I might have taken joy full-hearted / Hearing the great boom / Of Autumn, watching the fire, talking / Of books in the half gloom’ (14–8). The poem ends with an almost incantatory request to the wind to ‘tell / Of comrades safe returned, home-keeping / Music and Autumn smell. / Comfort blow him and friendly greeting, / Hearten him, wish him well!’ (20–4) Although, as observed earlier, the descriptions of apples and leaves torn and strewn by the wind in the first stanza are possible metaphors for dead soldiers and hence reflect the underlying trauma that Gurney’s nostalgia is unable to fully overcome, by the end that nostalgia has won through. Reality is temporarily suspended by visions of ‘comrades safe returned, home-keeping’ and ‘Music and Autumn smell’, which attenuate the impact of the conditions the poet is actually experiencing.

The ameliorating impulse also works in more subtle and less straightforward ways, in which nostalgia for simple pastoral landscapes is replaced by a closer engagement with nature in an attempt to transmute the grim and often unbearable conditions of the war into something more palatable, rather than merely suspend them. Thomas's 'Rain', which like most of his 'war poems' deals only obliquely with the war, illustrates this engagement with nature and subsequent attempt at transformation. The poet sits alone in a hut at night, possibly doing sentry duty during military training in England, and listens to the rain. Such is his awareness of the war and the suffering it is causing that something as innocuous as the rain becomes a reminder of death, and a bridge between him and the dead and dying in the trenches and battlefields: 'But here I pray that none whom once I loved / Is dying to-night or lying still awake / Solitary, listening to the rain, / Either in pain or thus in sympathy' (8–11). Nature becomes synonymous with death and suffering – not just the rain, but the '[m]yriads of broken reeds all still and stiff' (14), an obvious metaphor for corpses. Yet the poet's engagement with the rain also transforms his apprehension of death into something not quite positive, but at least more measured and less nihilistic. Even as the poet is reminded of his own death (3) by the rain, part of his regret at dying is also that he will no longer 'hear the rain nor give it thanks / For washing me cleaner than I have been / Since I was born into this solitude' (4–6). In addition, there is the recognition that '[b]lessed are the dead that the rain rains upon' (7), presenting the rain as an ambiguous rather than negative entity. The rain may be a reminder or even harbinger of death, but it also purifies and blesses. As Stan Smith argues, a 'lament for a "solitude" in which all loves have drowned becomes, in the moment of despair, a celebration which reaches out to recover and endorse those supposedly lost loves' (174). At the poem's conclusion, Thomas's relationship with death is crystallised via his relationship with the rain: 'Like me who have no love which this wild rain / Has not dissolved except the love of death, / If love

it be for what is perfect and / Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint' (15–8). In these final lines, the poet appears to come to terms with and even embrace death with newfound clarity and certainty. The rain, as adumbrated in earlier lines, washes away all other secondary concerns and leaves him with only 'the love of death', death now being something 'perfect' that cannot disappoint. Although an overall sense of melancholy pervades the poem from beginning to end, the poet has worked through his emotions in tandem with the rainfall and reached a state of placid, if gloomy, acceptance.

Amelioration is also observable in the war poets' engagement with people, both at home and, more commonly, at the front. Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', one of the few poems of his that casts civilians in a positive light, works through the simultaneous contrast and parallels of its two parts. The octave decries the typical funeral accoutrements of 'prayers' and 'bells' as hypocritical 'mockeries' (5) that do not do justice to the violence of the soldiers' deaths, suggesting that only the 'monstrous anger' (2) of guns and other weapons will do. The sestet, on the other hand, introduces the human element of commemoration – the church boys in whose eyes 'shine the holy glimmers of good-byes' (11), and the girls with 'pallor' (12) on their brows. The latent emotion suggested by their glimmering eyes and pallid brows is, the poem suggests, a more fitting and sincere send-off than any material pomp. Essentially, the poem goes through two appropriate (to the poet) but very different forms of farewell – the cacophony of the guns, rifles and shells, presented with bitter irony, followed by the tender remembrance of 'patient minds' (13), depicted more placidly and sincerely. Thus bitter irony gives way to the comfort of memory, reflection and honour, an amelioration established through the medium of people. Just as the poem concludes with a metaphorical 'drawing-down of blinds' (14) to commemorate the dead, Owen draws down the blinds on the violence and bloodshed of the war with his vision of 'patient' civilians back home who empathise

and remember. The ameliorating impulse makes Owen's conception of England, at least in this poem, even more inclusive as it blurs the boundary between soldiers and civilians, a boundary that the war poets, for all their enhanced inclusiveness, do not often cross.

The horrors of the front line are also diminished by the poets' engagement with their fellow soldiers. When the focus is on the homely and identifiable mannerisms of other men, reality is temporarily narrowed to a more comfortable sphere. Gurney's 'The Bohemians' pays tribute to the soldiers who were not temperamentally suited to be soldiers and hence could never master or understand army protocol: 'Certain people would not clean their buttons, / Nor polish buckles after latest fashions, / Preferred their hair long, putties comfortable, / Barely escaped hanging, indeed hardly able' (1–4). The poem continually alternates between descriptions of the 'Bohemian' soldiers and the more depressingly (in Gurney's view) orthodox ones, striving to neutralise the unsavoury with the hopeful: 'Spending hours that sped like evil for quickness, / (While others burnished brasses, earned promotions) / These were the ones who jested in the trench, / While others argued of army ways, and wrenched / What little soul they had still further from shape' (6–10). The poem arguably only partially succeeds at this neutralisation as the Bohemians still die at the end, yet even the depiction of their deaths contains a certain element of amelioration: 'In Artois or Picardy they lie – free of useless fashions' (17). Gurney's statement is of course grimly ironic and suggestive of the injustice of the war's indiscriminate killing, but there is also a quiet, and perhaps even slightly humorous, sense of satisfaction that the soldiers are truly 'free of useless fashions'. In particular, the word 'useless' (a word clearly used in a straightforward and non-ironic way), establishes this, since if irony or satire had been the poet's only intent, the word might have been replaced with something more indicative of that irony. That

sense that the soldiers are genuinely free of their torment attenuates the trauma of the orthodox soldier's life that the poet condemns.

Thomas's short poem 'A Private' also harbours a similar ameliorating impulse mixed with irony. The private's secret sleeping spot when he was a civilian ploughman is mirrored by his final resting place in France as a dead soldier, which is also unknown. The main theme of the poem is the disruption of the natural world by the war – by juxtaposing the two different kinds of 'sleeping' places, the poem highlights the ironic difference between them. Yet this manner of conveying the private's death is also conducive to amelioration: 'And where now at last he sleeps / More sound in France – that, too, he secret keeps' (8). By giving the false impression that the private is voluntarily keeping his resting place a secret, just as he did with his old sleeping place, the poem creates an illusion of control and continuity, effectively implying that things have not really changed – at some subconscious level, it seems as if the private has not even died. Although this technique is probably intended to ironically highlight the rupture in the natural world caused by the war, it also, perhaps paradoxically and inadvertently, soothes that rupture to an extent by establishing a sense of stability and familiarity.

Finally, the overall conservatism underlying the war poets' sense of Englishness may also be attributable in part to the desire to reduce the trauma of the war experience. As mentioned, the vision of a traditional and largely pastoral England is a comforting one, with its implications of perpetuity. Likewise, their use of traditional language and forms links their work with an immutable past. The conservative treatment of class also owes something to the ameliorating impulse. For instance, some of the overly-simplistic depictions of rank-and-file soldiers as ignorant but stoic country men are affirming, as the blind faith and dedication shown by those soldiers provides something admirable and consistent in the midst of

squalor[33]. The soldier in Sassoon's 'The Redeemer' is effectively apotheosised by being compared to Christ: 'I say that he was Christ, who wrought to bless / All groping things with freedom bright as air, / And with His mercy washed and made them fair' (30–2). The comparison, as previously observed, is specious and unconvincing as the soldier is anything but an omniscient Christ-like figure, yet this very speciousness hints at the poet's eagerness to draw consolation from a traumatic situation by apotheosising his subject without any logical justification. The result of the soldier's uncritical dedication to his duty is also made clear: 'But to the end, unjudging, he'll endure / Horror and pain, not uncontent to die / That Lancaster on Lune may stand secure' (25–7). The image of an enduring Lancaster 'stand[ing] secure' as a direct consequence of the soldier's sacrifice reflects the extent of Sassoon's conservatism, as well as his desire to improve the situation by invoking an unchanged and unchanging England.

On the other side of the class divide, upper-class conventions and stereotypes are also invoked to transfigure the ugliness of battle. Graves's 'The Dead Fox Hunter' commemorates the courageous death of a captain, with the first two stanzas describing his final battle with typical directness and detail: 'We saw that, dying and in hopeless case, / For others' sake that day / He'd smothered all rebellious groans: in death / His fingers were tight clenched between his teeth' (9–12). This depiction of the traditional British 'stiff upper lip' and gentlemanly restraint is in itself consolatory, but the poet goes even further by imagining the brave captain in heaven, performing the stereotypical upper-class activity of fox-hunting:

So, if Heaven had no Hunt before he came,

[33] Of course, this point also links amelioration with the war poets' conception of people.

Why, it must find one now:
If any shirk and doubt they know the game,
There's one to teach them how:
And the whole host of Seraphim complete
Must jog in scarlet to his opening Meet.

(19–24)

Graves's exaggerated and hubristic, and perhaps slightly humorous, depiction of the captain dictating the practices of heaven and the Seraphim as a reward for his courage seems clearly designed to temper the brutal reality that he died in intense agony – a reality that the poet does not deny but nevertheless seeks to transform into something more appealing to his upper-class sensitivities. Sassoon's 'To Any Dead Officer' also seeks a similar transformation, vis-à-vis both class and language. As already established, the poet's intimate second-person address to the officer is in recognisably upper-class diction. Although the poem makes constant reference to the brutality of the war, its grimly jocular, conversational and understated tone suggests the poet's desire to impose a sense of normality on events: 'You joked at shells and talked the usual "shop," / Stuck to your dirty job and did it fine: / With "Jesus Christ! when *will* it stop? / Three years... it's hell unless we break their line"' (21–4). Sassoon himself described the poem as having been written 'with a sense of mastery and detachment' despite its poignant subject (Cited in Stephen 206–7), and that sense of mastery and detachment probably sprang partly from the instinct to ameliorate. Like Graves, Sassoon still seeks to expose the unsavoury aspects of the war – he wrote the poem 'in the middle of June [1917]... after pondering over the statement of protest' (Egremont 147) – but still attempts a measure of amelioration through the linguistic and cultural accoutrements of his class.

On the whole, then, the ameliorating impulse could be said to have contributed to the key aspects of the war poets' new conceptions of England and Englishness by causing them to seek solace in visions of immutability and tradition, which transmute the trauma of the war and enable them to attain a measure of acceptance. Although this may seem at odds with their often brutally direct descriptions of battle and carnage, they are in fact two sides of the same coin as that very refusal to whitewash the gruesome aspects of war leaves them in need of amelioration, since if they had instead obscured or failed to acknowledge its reality no consolation would be necessary, as Brooke's sonnets amply demonstrate. Their entire vision is of an 'English heaven' ('The Soldier', 14) that could be said to be an amelioration in itself, or at least would be if there were a frame of reference for it. Yet at the same time the ameliorating impulse, when viewed alongside the war poets' fundamental conservatism, places their vision of England closer to Brooke's 'English heaven' than might be immediately apparent. Ultimately, despite the trauma of the war experience and the complex attitudes it evoked, the war poets were still, in Gurney's words, 'boys of England' ('To England – a Note', 1) with a visceral attachment to their native land, however imperfect or inadequate the war experience made it appear.

List of Works Cited

Primary Texts:

Blunden, Edmund. *Selected Poems*. Ed. Robyn Marsack. Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1982.

Blunden, Edmund. *Undertones of War*. London: Penguin, 2000.

Eliot, Thomas Stearns. *The Waste Land and Other Poems*. Ed. Frank Kermode. New York: Penguin, 1998.

Georgian Poetry 1911–1912. London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1923.

Graves, Robert. *Poems About War*. London: Cassell, 1988.

Gurney, Ivor. *Selected Poems*. Ed. P.J. Kavanagh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Gurney, Ivor. *Severn & Somme and War's Embers*. Ed. R.K.R. Thornton. Northumberland and Manchester: The Mid Northumberland Arts Group and Carcanet Press, 1987.

Housman, A.E. *A Shropshire Lad and Other Poems*. Ed. Archie Burnett. London: Penguin, 2010.

Kipling, Rudyard. *The Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling*. Ed. R.T. Jones. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2001.

Owen, Wilfred. *Selected Letters*. Ed. John Bell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Owen, Wilfred. *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*. Ed. C. Day Lewis. New York: New Directions Publishing, 1964.

Rosenberg, Isaac. *The Collected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg*. Ed Gordon Bottomley and Denys Harding. London: Chatto and Windus, 1962.

Rosenberg, Isaac. *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg*. Ed Gordon Bottomley and Denys Harding. London: Chatto and Windus, 1937.

Sassoon, Siegfried. *Collected Poems 1908–1956*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984.

Sorley, Charles Hamilton. *The Collected Poems of Charles Hamilton Sorley*. Ed. Jean Moorcroft Wilson. London: Cecil Woolf, 1985.

The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry, Second Edition. Ed. Jon Silkin. London: Penguin, 1981.

The Winter of the World: Poems of the Great War. Ed. Dominic Hibberd and John Onions. London: Constable, 2008.

Thomas, Edward. *The Collected Poems of Edward Thomas*. Ed R. George Thomas. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Thomson, James. *The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson*. Ed. J. Logie Robertson. London: Oxford University Press, 1908.

Wordsworth, William. *Selected Poems*. Ed. Stephen Gill. London: Penguin, 2004.

Secondary Texts:

Campbell, Patrick. *Siegfried Sassoon: A Study of the War Poetry*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1999.

Clausson, Nils. "'Perpetuating the Language': Romantic Tradition, the Genre Function, and the Origins of the Trench Lyric." *Journal of Modern Literature* 30.1 (Fall 2006): 104–28.

Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837*, 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Coyle, Martin. "Language, Class, Death and Landscape in the Poetry of the First World War." *English: The Journal of the English Association* 44.179 (Summer 1995): 121–35.

Egremont, Max. *Siegfried Sassoon: A Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus andGiroux, 2005.

Featherstone, Simon. *War Poetry: An Introductory Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Hibberd, Dominic. *The First World War*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1990.

Hibberd, Dominic. "Wilfred Owen and the Georgians." *Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language* 30.117 (February 1979): 28–40.

Holderness, Graham. "'Shakespeare-land" in *This England, That Shakespeare*. Ed. Willy Maley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010, 201–224.

Johnston, John Hubert. *English Poetry of the First World War; A Study in the Evolution of Lyric and Narrative Form*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964.

Lehmann, John. *The English Poets of the First World War*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1981.

Longley, Edna. "The Great War, history, and the English lyric" in *The Cambridge Companion to The Literature of the First World War*. Ed. Vincent Sherry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Lucas, John. *England and Englishness*. London: Hogarth Press, 1991.

Lucas, John. *Modern English Poetry from Hardy to Hughes*. London: B.T. Batsford, 1986.

Moore, Jr, L. Hugh. "Siegfried Sassoon and Georgian Realism." *Twentieth Century Literature* 14.4 (January 1969): 199–209.

Parfitt, George. *English Poetry of the First World War: Contexts and Themes*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990.

Perkins, David. *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987.

Reeves, James. "Introduction" to *Georgian Poetry*. Ed. James Reeves. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962, xi–xxiii.

Reilly, Catherine W. *English Poetry of the First World War: A Bibliography*. London: George Prior, 1978.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.

Sassoon, Siegfried. "Foreword" to *The Collected Poems of Isaac Rosenberg*. Ed. Gordon Bottomley and Denys Harding. London: Chatto and Windus, 1962, vii–viii.

Saunders, Max. "Friendship and Enmity in First World War Literature." *Literature and History* 17.1 (Summer 2008): 62–77.

Scholssman, Beryl. "Baudelaire's place in literary and cultural history" in *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*. Ed. Rosemary Lloyd. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Silkin, Jon. "Introduction" to *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry,Second Edition*. Ed. Jon Silkin. London: Penguin, 1981, 15–77.

Silkin, Jon. *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Simon, Myron. "The Georgian Poetic." *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* Vol. 2, Papers of the Midwest Modern Language Association, No. 1 (1969): 121–35.

Smith, Stan. *Edward Thomas*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986.

Stephen, Martin. *The Price of Pity: Poetry, History and Myth in the Great War*. London: L. Cooper, 1996.

Watson, Alexander. *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Wiener, Martin J. *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, 1850–1980. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Wilson, Jean Moorcroft. *Charles Hamilton Sorley: A Biography*. London: Cecil Woolf, 1985.

Wilson, Jean Moorcroft. "Introduction" to *The Collected Poems of Charles Hamilton Sorley*. Ed. Jean Moorcroft Wilson. London: Cecil Woolf, 1985, 7–34.